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Religions of India

Foreword by KARAN SINGH

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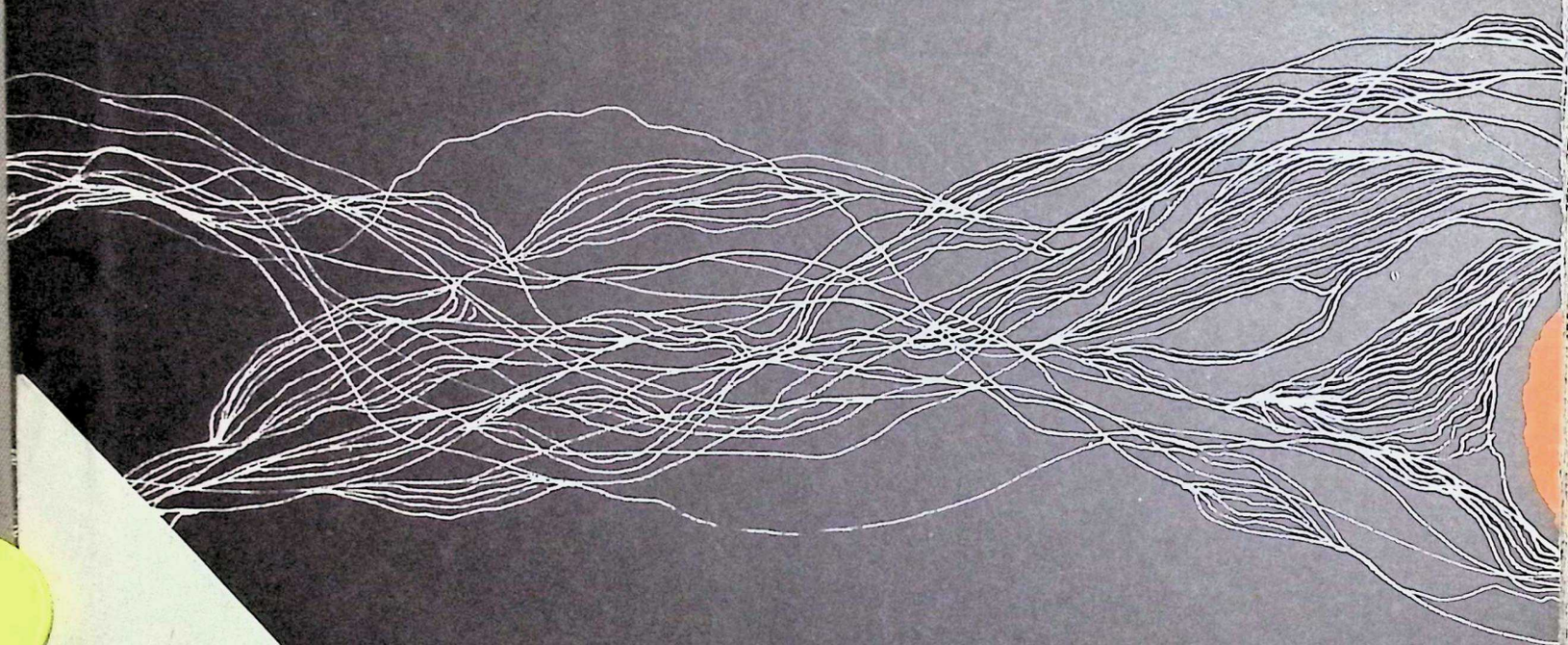

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Published by CLARION BOOKS
C-36, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110 001

Phototypeset and Printed at
IBC Press, G.T. Road, Shahdara, Delhi-110 032

PRINTED IN INDIA

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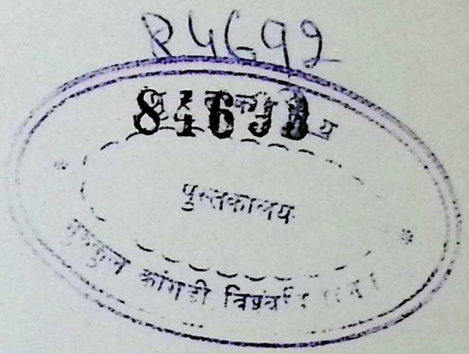

HINDUISM
JAINISM
BUDDHISM
SIKHISM
ZOROASTRIANISM
CHRISTIANITY
ISLAM
JUDAISM

Foreword by
Dr. Karan Singh

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author and publishers have pleasure in expressing their sincere gratitude and thanks to the various people, institutions and photographers listed below who spared their precious time and offered their fullest and most willing cooperation and help which made possible the publication of this volume:

Aris Farooqi, Ashwini Vashisht, Benjamin Israel, C. Sivaramamurti, C.L. Bharany, Chakresh Jain, Fr. E.R. Hambye, Ezekiel Malekar, Harish Jain, Inder Pasricha, Indu Jain, Prof. John R. Hinnells, K.S. Duggal, K.S. Jus, Khaliq Tonki, Prof. Klaus Bruhn, Berlin; Ven'ble L. Ariyawamsa Mahanayakathera Sipitaka Visarada, L.C. Jain, Prof. Mary Boyce, Iran; Dr. Moray, Raza Zaidi, Syed Ausaf Ali, Syed Jamaluddin, Wiqar Ahmad Siddiqui, Y. Krishan.

Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi; Baroda Museum; Digambar Jain Lal Mandir, Delhi; Goethals Memorial Library, St. Xavier's College, Calcutta; Government Museum, Madras; Indian Institute of Islamic Studies, Tughlakabad, New Delhi; Institute for Jewish and Inter Faith Studies, New Delhi; Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi; L.D. Institute, Ahmedabad; Mahabodhi Society of India, New Delhi; Archaeological Museum, Mathura; National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore; National Museum, Delhi; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Photo Flash, Baroda; Publications Division, Delhi; Sacred Heart Cathedral, Delhi; Snehsadan Institute for the Study of Religion, Pune.

Carmel Berkson, Bombay; Daniel Elijah B. Gadkar, Poona; Dushyant Parasher; Harish Chand Jain; Rajesh Bedi; Rupinder Khullar; S.J. Singh; Vishnu Punjabi.

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11. Magen David Synagogue, Bombay, built in 1861.
12. Simhath Torah (rejoicing over the law) festival celebration in a flower-decked synagogue.
13. Lighting the Hannukah, the eight-branched candelabrum on the occasion of Hannukah, the feast of Dedication.
14. Kiddush being recited under the succah (booth) during the festival of Succoth.

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Foreword

Truth is One, the Wise Call it by Many Names

This eternal truth, as enunciated in the Rig Veda, has been the bedrock of India's cultural and religious ethos. Nowhere else in the world have so many people and so many religions found a home as in India. For millennia, varied groups of people with differing cultural and religious heritage have come to India to find a home and to grow and flourish here. It seems that there is something in the rich and fertile soil of India that is conducive to the development of religious consciousness—and this is true not only of Hinduism, the great indigenous religion and its off-shoots, but also of the Semitic religions—Islam, Christianity and Judaism—which came to the country from the West. India is truly a land of faith, and within its borders can be found followers of all the major religions of the world.

The origins of Hinduism are lost in the mists of antiquity, but till today it commands the allegiance of hundreds of millions in India as well as in other countries where the Indian cultural influence has been felt through the centuries. Unique among the great world religions, Hinduism owes its origins not to any single teacher or book but to the collective wisdom and spiritual insight of a whole group of inspired seers known as Rishis. It retains an unrivalled richness and diversity in its religious beliefs and practices, and could be likened to a vast philharmonic orchestra composed of numerous instruments and yet expressing an all-encompassing harmony.

From the matrix of Hinduism have issued three other great world religions—Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Jainism has a very ancient tradition, and its last great Tirthankar was an Indian nobleman revered as Lord Mahavira. The followers of the Jain religion today, although comparatively a few, are an important mercantile community and play a significant role in the social and economic life of India. The Jain texts are of great antiquity, and some of its temples are among the most beautiful in the world. It has a strong tradition of non-violence and asceticism, and continues to produce monks of great learning and spiritual attainment.

The second great religion that flowed from Hinduism is the one founded by Prince Siddhartha, revered throughout the world as Gautama the Buddha. The story of the Buddha's sheltered childhood, his traumatic discovery of suffering, old age and death, and his great renunciation in search of deliverance is universally known. The Four Noble Truths propounded by him include the Eightfold path of spiritual liberation, and have influenced billions of people in Asia over the last twenty-five centuries. In India, a number of Buddhist teachings have been incorporated into Hinduism, while Buddhism remains the predominant religion in many countries of South and Southeast Asia. It has produced some of the greatest works of art and architecture known to mankind, and continues to provide inspiration to a large segment of the human race.

The third religion born from Hinduism owes its origin to the great saint, Guru Nanak. The main homeland of the Sikhs is the Indian State of Punjab, but a large number of Sikhs also live in the adjoining States as well as in other parts of India and abroad.The mystical faith founded by Guru Nanak was transformed by Sikhism's tenth great teacher, Guru Gobind Singh, into a militant and dynamic creed. The Golden Temple at Amritsar is the spiritual centre of the Sikh religion, and is widely revered by all communities in India.

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Apart from the four religions which originated in India, the other four great world religions have also flourished in this country for centuries. The religion preached by the holy prophet of Iran, Zoroaster, came to India centuries ago when the Zoroastrians fled Iran after the Arab conquest. Although numerically a very small community, the Parsis have played a remarkable role in the development of India over the last two centuries. The sacred book of the Parsis, the Avesta, continues to be revered by its followers, and their fire-worship is practised in the major cities.

Christianity came to India many centuries before it reached Europe, as it is believed that St. Thomas, one of the original apostles of Jesus Christ, visited it in 56 A.D. and founded the first Christian settlement in the South. Much later, with the advent of European colonial power in the fifteenth century, Christian churches of all denominations sprung up in different parts of India. Christmas has become a major Indian holiday, and Christians play an important role in all spheres of Indian life.

Islam has of course been on Indian soil for a thousand years since the first trading contacts with the Arabs. Subsequently, there has been a long and complex association between Islam and Hinduism, one of the most positive aspects of which was the development of the Sufi cults of mysticism which cut across religious barriers. To this day the shrines of great Muslim saints in India are revered by all communities, and the Islamic impact has made a considerable contribution in various spheres of Indian life including language, music and architecture. The other great Western religion, Judaism, also has its adherents in India, and a synagogue has for centuries been active in the State of Kerala.

Thus in the same way as India has an extraordinary diversity in the linguistic, ethnic and cultural fields, it also enjoys a rich diversity of religious faith which is probably unique in the world. The Vedic dictum "Truth is one, the wise call it by many names" has always been the key concept in India, and that is why despite tension and conflict from time to time, all the great religions of the world have flourished in this country. The essays in this book attempt to describe the salient features of the great religions of India and to give the reader an idea of the richness of thought and philosophy of action that they express.

Mankind today stands at a decisive point in its long and tortuous history on this planet. Science and technology have given it tremendous power for good or for evil, but the dangerous divergence between knowledge and wisdom now threatens with extinction not only the human race but all life on this planet. The vital question is whether the powerful concepts contained in the world's great religions will be able to meet the tremendous challenge that mankind is facing today. It is our hope that this volume will help to clarify some of the basic religious insights, and that India with its vast and varied tapestry of religious experience and its unrivalled tradition of spiritual achievement may once again be able to show a new path for the future.

New Delhi,
September 1, 1983

Karan Singh

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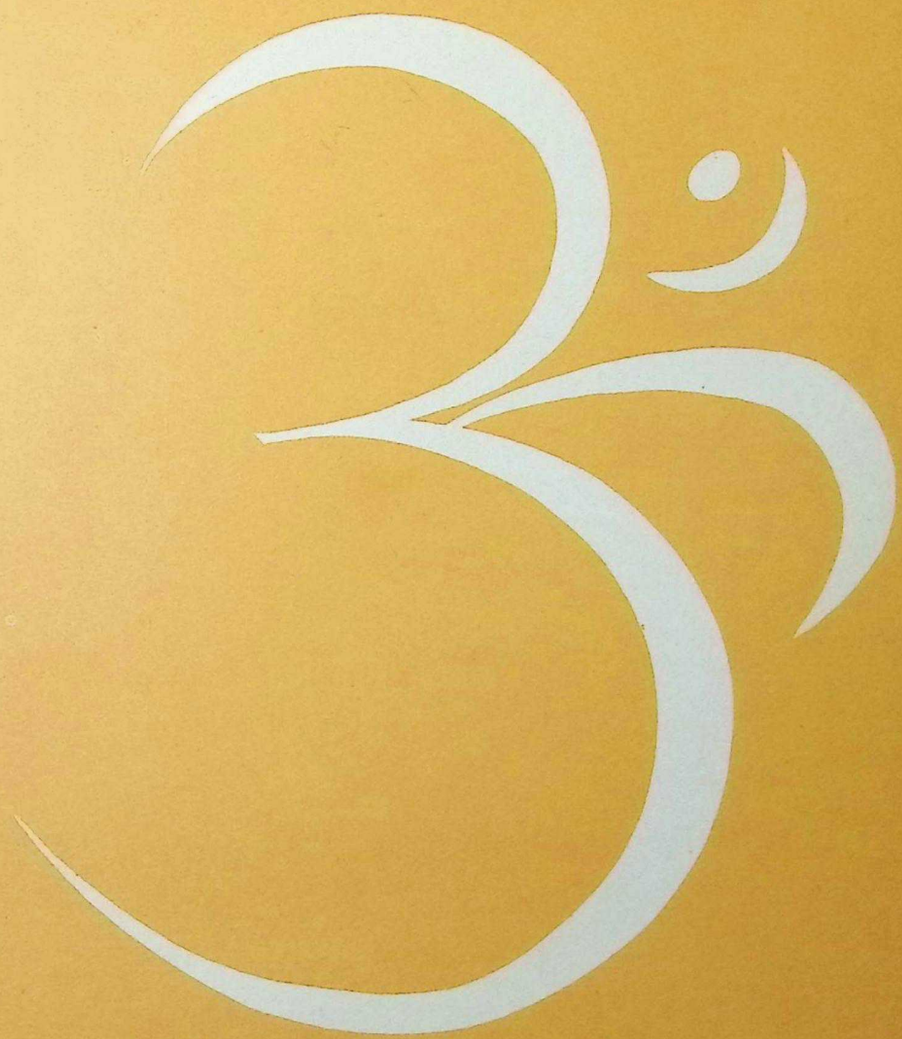

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ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।

This entire cosmos, whatever is still or moving,
is pervaded by the Divine.

Isha Upanishad 1

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Hinduism

The religion that has come to be known as Hinduism is certainly the oldest and most varied of all the great religions of the world. The word ' Hinduism ' itself is a geographical term based upon the Sanskrit name for the great river that runs across the northern boundaries of India, known as the Sindhu. For those living on the other side of this river, the entire region to the south-east of the Sindhu, which the Greeks called the Indus, came to be known as the land of the Hindus, and the vast spectrum of faiths that flourished here acquired the generic name Hinduism. In fact, Hinduism calls itself the *Sanatana Dharma,* the eternal faith, because it is based not upon the teachings of a single preceptor but on the collective wisdom and inspiration of great seers and sages from the very dawn of Indian civilization.

THE SCRIPTURES

The Sanskrit word for philosophy is *Darshana*, or 'seeing', which implies that Hinduism is not based merely on intellectual speculation but is grounded upon direct and immediate perception. This, in fact, distinguishes Indian philosophy from much of Western philosophical thought. The oldest and most important scriptures of Hinduism are the Vedas, which contain inspired utterances of seers and sages who had achieved direct perception of the Divine Being. The Vedas are considered to be eternal, because they are not merely superb poetic compositions but represent the divine truth itself as perceived through the elevated consciousness of great seers.

The four *Vedas* — the Rig, the Sama, the Yajur and the Atharva — contain between them over a hundred thousand verses, which include

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some of the greatest mystical poetry produced by the human race. For example, the famous Hymn of Creation in the *Rigveda* (X-129-1/7) is an extraordinary utterance. It has been translated by Griffith as follows:

Then was not non-existent nor existent:
there was no realm of air, no sky beyond it:
what covered it, and where? and what gave shelter?
Was Water there, unfathomed depth of water?

Death was not then, nor was there aught immortal:
no sign was there, the day's and night's divider.
That One thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature:
apart from it was nothing whatsoever.

Darkness there was: at first concealed in darkness
this All was indiscriminate chaos.
All that existed then was void and formless:
by the great power of Warmth was born that unit.

Thereafter rose Desire in the beginning
Desire the primal seed and germ of Spirit.
Sages who searched with their heart's thought discovered
the existent's kinship with the non-existent.

Transversely was their severing line extended:
What was above it then, and what below it?
There were begetters, there were mighty forces,
free action here and energy up yonder.

Who verily knows and who can here declare it,
whence it was born and whence comes this creation?
The gods are later than the world's production,
who knows then whence it first came into being?

He, the first origin of this creation,
whether he formed it all or did not form it,
Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven,
he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not.

The Vedas contain beautiful hymns addressed to various powers of nature such as the Sun, the Moon, the Ocean, the Rain, the Dawn, all pervaded by a deep intuitive awareness of the essential unity and interconnectedness behind all these phenomena. Portions deal with the ritual worship of the early Aryans, the *Yajna* revolving around the sacred fire which was looked upon as the intermediary between the human and the divine powers. There are also a fascinating array of medical prescriptions, specially in the *Atharva Veda*, and a great deal of other social material including hymns to matrimony and friendship, prayers for progeny, longevity, cattle and prosperity. Taken together, they constitute a unique document of the religious consciousness of the human race. It is virtually a miracle that they came down intact through thousands of years entirely by memory, a fantastic feat of mnemonics for which countless generations of Brahmins deserve unqualified gratitude. It was only in the middle of the nineteenth

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century that the great orientologist Freidrich Max Müller brought out the first printed edition of the *Rig Veda.*

The *Upanishads* are known as the *Vedanta,* or the end of the Vedas, both because they come at the end of the Vedic collections and also because they represent the culmination of Vedic teachings. One hundred and eight Upanishads have been preserved, of which at least fourteen are of major importance. These remarkable dialogues between the teacher and one or more pupils deal with the deepest problems of human existence, of death and other realms of being, of the goal of life and the stages of spiritual realization. The *Ishavasya Upanishad,* though containing only 18 verses, is considered to be probably the most important such text. Its famous first line, which contains the very essence of Hinduism, is as follows:

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This entire cosmos, whatever is still or moving,
is pervaded by the Divine.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* has a beautiful verse (2.2.3) which brings out the essential role of the Upanishads as vehicles for spiritual realization:

Having taken as a bow the great weapon of the
Upanishads, one should fix on it the arrow
sharpened by constant meditation; drawing it
with a mind filled with That (Brahman), penetrate,
O handsome youth, the Imperishable as the target.

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The *Katha Upanishad* contains the memorable dialogue between the boy Nachiketas and Yama, the God of Death, and represents a remarkable formulation of the Vedantic gospel. It is significant that in Hinduism death is not something to be looked upon with horror and hatred, but rather is considered to be as essential an aspect of existence as life, part of the inescapable dualities of day and night, heat and cold, good and evil, joy and sorrow that are woven into the very texture of manifested existence. It is only by transcending these dualities and attaining the 'Brahmasthiti', the state of Brahman, that the human being can finally fulfil his cosmic destiny.

Contrary to a popular misconception often encountered in the West, Hinduism is not a passive, world-negating religion. Indeed it is a vibrant, life-affirming faith, using 'life in the deeper sense of that supreme poise that transcends the dualities of life and death. There is, in the Hindu view, a supreme state into which it is possible for the human consciousness to enter and which, once achieved, places one above the endless cycle of rebirth in which the entire cosmos is imprisoned. As the sage Shveta-shwetara says in the great Upanishad that bears his name:

I know that Great Being, effulgent like the
Sun, on the other shore beyond the darkness. **(11.8)**

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and Lord Krishna in the *Bhagvadgita* (13.17) describes the supreme goal as 'the light of lights beyond the darkness'.

The attainment of this exalted state of consciousness is not incompatible with action in this world. While it is true that there has always been a significant strand of renunciation in Hinduism, which found fuller expression in Jainism and Buddhism that flowed from the mother faith, it is useful to remember that the goal of Hinduism is a luminous, glowing state of supreme bliss, not a negative self-annihilation.

There are five basic tenets that underlie Hinduism which, if properly understood, provide the key to an understanding of a faith that is bewildering in its apparent diversity and complexity. The first is the concept of 'Brahman', the unchanging, undying reality that pervades the entire cosmos. The Vedic seers saw that everything in the universe changes, and they called the creation 'Samsara', that which always moves. But they also perceived that behind this change there was an unchanging substratum from which the changing worlds emanated like sparks from a great fire. This supreme, all-pervasive entity known as 'Brahman' has been beautifully described in various Upanishads. Thus the *Mundaka Upanishad* has the following verse:

Brahman verily is this immortal being.
In front is Brahman, behind is Brahman,
to the right and to the left.
It spreads forth above and below.
Verily, Brahman is this effulgent universe. **(2.2.12)**

Similarly, the following important passage in the *Shvetashwetara Upanishad* (4.2-4) shows clearly that although the Hindus worshipped many manifestations of the divine, they realised that behind them all, there was the same all-pervasive Brahman.

Thou art the fire,
Thou art the sun,
Thou art the air,
Thou art the moon,
Thou art the starry firmament,
Thou art Brahman Supreme:
Thou art the Waters,
Thou the creator of all:

Thou art woman, thou art man,
Thou art the youth, thou art the maiden,
Thou art the old man tottering with his staff;
Thou facest everywhere.

Thou art the dark butterfly,
Thou art the green parrot with red eyes,
Thou art the thunder cloud, the seasons, the seas.
Without beginning art thou,

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Beyond time, beyond space.
Thou art he from whom sprang
The three worlds.

Filled with Brahman are the things we see;
Filled with Brahman floweth all that is;
From Brahman all — yet is he still the same.

The second great insight of the Vedic seers was that as the changing universe outside was pervaded by the Brahman, the changing world within man himself was based upon the undying 'Atman'. They realised that 'like corn, a mortal ripens and like corn is born again' (*Katha Upanishad,* 1.1.6). The human entity is born again and again across the aeons, gathering a multitude of experiences and gradually moving towards the possibility of perfection. This immortal spark they called the 'Atman'.

Having perceived the existence of the undying Brahman without and the undying Atman within, the great seers were able to make the critical leap of realising through their spiritual insight that the Atman and Brahman were essentially one. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad,* there is the famous story of Shvetaketu, who is taught by his father in a series of statements which end with the famous words *Tat tvam asi* — 'that thou art', meaning that the Atman was essentially the Brahman. What the exact relationship between the two is has been the basis of various great schools of Vedanta, some holding with Shankaracharya that in fact the two are identical (the Advaita Vedanta), some with Ramanujacharya that they are both unitary and dual (the Vishishtadwaita) and some with Madhvacharya that they are similar but always separate (the Dwaita).

Having established the existence of the Brahman, the Atman and their relationship, the fourth major tenet of Hinduism is that the supreme goal of life lies in spiritual realization whereby the individual becomes aware of the deathless Atman within him. The realisation of the Atman at once brings an entirely new dimension into the picture, and the realized soul transcends the cycle of suffering, illness, old age and death which are inevitable concomitants of ordinary life, the wheel of change and decay of the manifested universe. He may still choose to stay within the limits of manifestations and, by his presence, sweeten the bitter sea of suffering, but he is no longer bound to do so.

The fifth concept which lies at the very heart of the Hindu way of life is that of 'Karma', a concept that includes action, causality and destiny. Action being inevitable, the human individual is bound by the results of his actions, pleasant fruits flowing from good deeds and unpleasant consequences from evil ones. Karma can thus be considered the moral equivalent of the law of conservation of energy, or the equivalence of action and reaction, in the field of natural sciences. While it is true that what we are today is the result of our past deeds, it also follows that we are the makers of our future by the way we act at present. Thus, far from implying fatalism, as

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is often wrongly believed, Karma gives tremendous responsibility to the individual and places in his own hands the key to his future destiny. Naturally, the unerring law of Karma can work itself out only over a sufficiently long period of time; therefore the Hindu belief in reincarnation with the Atman being reborn in a long series until the attainment of liberation. Indeed, if man were to have only one life, there would seem to be no moral or spiritual justification at all for the tremendous disparities and evidently undeserved suffering, even of children, which is so evident all around us. As the *Bhagvadgita* has it,

> **As a man casts off his worn-out garments and takes others that are new, so the Atman casts off worn-out bodies and enters others that are new. (2.23).**

THE KEY CONCEPTS

In addition to the Vedas and the Upanishads, Hinduism has a vast corpus of auxiliary scriptures including the two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.* Between them they express the collective wisdom and history of the entire race, and have had a profound influence on all aspects of Hindu life and culture in India and throughout South-East Asia for thousands of years. Then there are the 18 *Puranas,* rich in myth and symbol, of which the best known is the *Srimad Bhagavatam;* the *Brahma Sutras* which contain Vedantic philosophy in the form of aphorisms, and the *Tantras* dealing with the esoteric aspects of the spiritual quest. There are also the codes of conduct, including the elaborate *Manusmriti,* which seek to relate religion to the social and individual lives of Hindus.

Embedded within the huge compass of the Mahabharata is that crest-jewel of Hindu thought and one of the great religious classics of mankind, the Bhagvadgita. Before going into the teaching of the Gita, however, it will be useful to mention five sets of concepts which are an integral part of the Hindu ethos, as some understanding of these is essential if one is to grasp the main thrust of the Gita's teaching. Briefly, the concepts are as follows:

The Four Yugas or Cycles of Time

The Hindu concept of time is cyclical, not linear. The universe is 'Anadi-ananta', without beginning, without end, and goes through recurrent phases of manifestation and dissolution. It is quite extraordinary how the Hindu concept of time is becoming more comprehensible with recent developments in extra-galactic cosmology. Each day of Brahma, the creator principle in the Hindu trinity, consists of four billion, three hundred and twenty million years, and the night of Brahma is of a similar duration. Thus the entire universe is a process of the out-breathing and in-breathing of Brahma, corresponding to alternating periods of manifestation and dissolution. Each manifested cycle is divided into four Yugas or aeons — *Satya,*

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Treta, Dwapara and *Kali.* In the Satyayuga, virtue is in the ascendant, but this diminishes progressively until in the Kaliyuga it virtually disappears. At the end of each Kaliyuga, there is tremendous destruction *Pralaya* after which the golden age appears again. The four yugas taken together form a 'Mahayuga' or a great cycle. We are now believed to be living in the Kaliyuga of the present cycle.

The Four Ashramas or Stages of Life

In the Hindu view, human life is divided into four *Ashramas* or stages — *Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa.* As the ideal life-span of the Hindus was a hundred years, each of these stages consists of 25-year periods. The first 25 years would be student life, when the young man is expected to spend his time and energy upon the attainment of education at the feet of a qualified teacher, and to observe sexual abstinence. Once this is completed, he moves on to the Grihasthashrama, or householder stage, wherein he marries, raises a family and participates in economically productive activity for the welfare of society. By 50, he is ready to move on to the Vanaprastha stage of semi-retirement, in which he gradually brings himself to detach himself from worldly activities and to concentrate upon the study of scriptures and meditational practices. Finally, at 75 he is ready to withdraw entirely from social life and become a sanyasi or ascetic by renouncing the world, freeing himself from all social responsibilities and concentrating exclusively upon the spiritual quest. Sanyasashrama, however, can be entered into even at a younger age by a person who renounces worldly life and joins one of the many monastic orders that exist in Hinduism.

The Four Purusharthas or Goals of Life

According to Hindu thought, these four goals are *Dharma, Artha, Kama* and *Moksha.* Dharma is a word that has often been translated as 'religion', but in fact it is more comprehensive. It implies not only a religious and philosophical framework but a total world-view, including a scheme of right conduct under various circumstances. It comes from the root 'dhri' which means to uphold, and in the broadest sense is used for the universal laws of nature that uphold the cosmos. It also implies such concepts as justice, virtue, morality, righteousness, law and duty. It is the first of the four goals, because it is the most comprehensive and is valid throughout the life of a human being. Artha, or wealth, is the second goal. It is interesting that Hinduism not only tolerates the importance of wealth but accepts it positively as one of the four main goals of life provided its acquisition and utilisation are in accord with the broad principles of Dharma. The third goal is Kama or sensual enjoyment. Here again, Hinduism gives an important place to sensual enjoyment, realising that, while renunciation may be suitable for the ascetic, it is certainly not suited to the common man. Therefore, the concept of Kama is incorporated in the Hindu ethos, and indeed it has its own shastra in the form of the famous *Kamasutra* by Vatsyayana. The final goal in Hindu thought is Moksha, or release from suffering, old age

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and ultimately from death itself. As mentioned earlier, Moksha is not simply a question of survival after death, which in any case is taken for granted in Hinduism; it implies transcending both life and death by the attainment of that spiritual poise whereby man is liberated from the wheel of Samsara.

The Four Varnas or Castes

According to the traditional Hindu view, human beings are divided into four categories on the basis of their intrinsic qualities. The highest caste consists of *Brahmins,* the thinkers, philosophers, priests, whose role it is to provide spiritual guidance and intellectual sustenance to society. Next come the *Kshatriyas,* or warriors, whose dharma revolves around ruling the nation and defending it against aggression. Third are the *Vaishyas,* or traders, who are involved in agricultural and commercial operations, while all that falls within the sphere of service is the responsibility of the fourth category of *Shudras,* or labourers. It is interesting that the word 'varna' also means colour, and if one looks back over the history of early India, it is clear that the problem of colour as between the Aryans, the great existing Dravidian civilization, and the numerous aboriginal tribes was a major factor in the development of this caste concept. There were certain categories beyond the pale of the caste system which were known as the outcastes, and whose ill-treatment over the centuries is a standing disgrace to the otherwise remarkable achievements of Hindu civilization.

The Four Yogas or Paths to the Divine

The word 'Yoga' is derived from the root 'yuj' meaning to join or yoke, and it involves the joining of the Atman with the Brahman, of the individual soul with the universal divine being. In the Hindu view, there are several methods of this union, and each spiritual aspirant chooses the one that is best suited to his inner and outer conditions. While the path is essentially one, it varies to the extent that emphasis is placed upon different human faculties. Over the ages, four main yogas or paths have developed — *Jnana, Bhakti, Karma* and *Raja.* Jnana is the path of intellectual discrimination, suitable for those whose intellects are highly developed and who are taught constantly to discriminate between the real and the unreal, the ephemeral and the eternal, until they reach spiritual realisation. Bhakti, or the path of devotion to a personal form of God, is based on the emotional urge and involves harnessing of the sovereign power of love to the spiritual quest. In this path, there is a deep emotional relationship between the human and the divine, beautifully expressed by Arjuna in the Gita as the combined relationship of a father to a son, a friend to a dear friend and a lover to his beloved. Karma, or the way of works, is best suited for people who are particularly drawn by social service, alleviation of human suffering and organisational activity, and whose constant compulsion for work is directed towards the divine. Finally, Raja Yoga involves various spiritual practices including physical and psychic practices set out in the classical work by Patanjali, the *Yogasutra.* These paths are by no means mutually exclusive,

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and indeed enjoy a benign symbiosis.

Another important aspect of Hindu thought is the concept of the *Avatara,* or descent of God in human form. In keeping with its concept of cyclic time, Hinduism holds that there have been numerous such descents in the past and will be more in the future. As Krishna himself says in the Gita:

Whensoever righteousness declines, O Bharata,
and unrighteousness arises, then do I manifest
myself upon earth. For the deliverance of the good,
for the destruction of evil-doers and for the
re-establishment of righteousness, I am born from
age to age. **(4, 7-8)**

With these concepts in mind, we can now turn to the Bhagvadgita. The teaching of the Upanishads is in a peaceful setting, usually in the forest 'ashramas' or retreats of the teacher. The setting of the Bhagvadgita, however, is entirely different. Here the teacher and the disciple — Sri Krishna and Arjuna — are placed in the very centre of the battlefield. The conches have been sounded, the flight of missiles has begun and, poised between the two armies, Arjuna suddenly suffers a failure of nerve when he sees arrayed against him his kinsmen and teachers. He is overcome by a great wave of revulsion, and at that critical juncture implores his friend and teacher to show him the correct path. The setting of the Gita is thus similar to the present human predicament. Man today finds himself in the midst of serious conflicts, both outer and inner, and it is on the battlefield of life that he needs correct guidance. This explains the special appeal of the Gita to modern man.

Another unique feature of the Gita is that it fuses the four paths into a single integral movement towards the divine. It deals with all the four yogas, but constantly seeks to integrate them around the overriding relationship between Arjuna and Sri Krishna, the human and the divine. While the Brahman of the Upanishads is impersonal and is therefore referred to as 'That', in the Gita Sri Krishna himself appears as the Divine Being that transcends both the manifest and the unmanifest in his all-encompassing consciousness. The divine in the Gita is not a non-personalised concept, but involves the personality raised as it were to the nth degree. Thus at the end of the teaching, Sri Krishna instructs Arjuna in these words:

The Lord, O Arjuna, is seated in the heart of all beings,
causing by his divine power the entire cosmos
to revolve as if mounted on a machine.
Take refuge in Him with your entire being, O Bharata;
by His Grace you will gain supreme peace and the eternal abode. **18.61-62**

Having thus spoken of the divine in the third person, Krishna completes the teaching with the following memorable verses:

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Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me,
Sacrifice to Me, bow to Me and to Me shall you come.
This is My pledge to you, for you are dear to Me.
Abandon all dharmas and take refuge in Me alone.
Fear not, I will deliver you from all sin. **18.65-66**

The Bhagvadgita is a remarkable fount of inspiration and power. Among its many memorable passages is the famous scene in the eleventh chapter where Krishna reveals to Arjuna his Divine Form which encompasses the entire cosmos and yet includes the great calm that lies behind all manifestation. It is this vision that is described as having the splendour of a thousand suns risen simultaneously in the sky. The Gita also contains the celebrated and oft-quoted statement with regard to works and their fruit. While the human being must work constantly for the welfare of the world, he should not be attached to the fruits of that work, and should repose them in the divine. The Gita thus teaches unceasing involvement in works while retaining an inner core of detachment, and dedicating the totality of human life to the divine will. Involvement without obsession is the key concept.

While there are many avataras in the Hindu scriptures, including manifestations of Shiva in the south Indian tradition, the best known list is a set of 10 incarnations of Vishnu known as the 'Dashavatara'. These have had a profound influence on popular Hinduism, and include two of the most popular and widely worshipped figures in the Hindu pantheon, Rama and Krishna. Interestingly, these 10 incarnations represent the evolutionary ladder in a most remarkable manner. They start with Matsya, the fish; then Kurma, the amphibious tortoise; then Varaha, the boar; then Narsimha, the man-lion; then Vamana, the dwarf; then Parashurama, the wielder of the great axe; then Sri Rama, the noble hero of the Ramayana; then Sri Krishna, the divine flutist and charioteer of the Mahabharata; then the Buddha, and, in the final incarnation of this cycle yet to manifest, the Kalki Avatara, depicted as a magnificent youth riding a great white horse with a meteor-like sword raining death and destruction on all sides, perhaps symbolizing some cataclysmic nuclear conflict.

The inclusion of the Buddha as the ninth incarnation needs special comment, because it reveals the great capacity in Hinduism to absorb even heretical movements. Evidently the fame and influence of the Buddha were so great that he could not be ignored, and yet his teachings were in some respects antithetical to classical Hinduism. He was, therefore, absorbed into the Hindu pantheon, so that he is revered today by Hindus with no difficulty at all. Indeed, although technically the number of Buddhists in India is very small, this is partly due to the fact that many of his teachings, such as his stern condemnation of animal sacrifice, have become part of the Hindu mainstream itself. To some extent, the same can be said about Christ, and most Hindus have no difficulty in accepting him as one of the incarnations of God. What Hinduism is not able to accept is the exclusive claim of any one teacher to the monopoly of divinity and wisdom for all time to come.

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CLASSICAL HINDUISM

With the Vedas, the Upanishads and the auxiliary scriptures culminating in the Bhagvadgita, the major contours of Hinduism became clearly defined. But unlike some other religions, where a single teacher or text became the final authority, in Hinduism there has been through the last two thousand years a continuous process of reinterpretation and restatement by a series of remarkable men and women. Some were kings and erudite scholars, others were common folk, often unlettered and unsophisticated. Some belonged to the 'higher' Brahmin and Kshatriya castes, others to the 'lower', including the 'outcastes'. Some spoke chaste Sanskrit, that most magnificent of human languages; others sang in the local dialects. Some lived in great palaces and temples; others in simple cottages, or roamed the countryside with neither home nor shelter. Some were devoted to Shiva, the great Lord seated in majestic solitude on the mountain peak; some to Krishna, the eternal lover playing his divine flute in the forests of Vrindavan. Some worshipped the great Mother in one of her innumerable forms, beauty enthroned upon the seat of power; others offered their homage to one or the other numerous deities in the Hindu pantheon rich with an inexhaustible store of symbol and image.

And yet, running through all these remarkable persons like a golden thread was the overriding common factor — their realization of the Divine. Hinduism has always reserved its deepest veneration for those who have in some way realized the Divine. Scholars are respected, rulers are feared, but real veneration is reserved only for the realized ones who constitute a race apart, the race that never dies. And it is a remarkable fact, largely responsible for the continued vitality of Hinduism through the ages, that it has in every century produced a number of such realized souls. Spread from Kashmir in the North to Kerala in the South, from Gujarat in the West to Assam in the East, these great souls have by the sheer force of their spiritual realization kept the inner power of Hinduism intact and re-illumined Hindu society in times of incredible adversity and ordeal. Had it not been for these great ones, truly the salt of the earth, Hinduism which had to undergo such savage persecution for centuries would have vanished from the face of this earth.

The Great Acharyas

Space permits only a rapid survey of the more important developments in Hinduism over the last twenty centuries. The first outstanding figure that comes to mind is Tiruvalluvar (*c.* 300 AD), the great Tamil saint, whose classic work, the *Tirukural,* is generally known as the Veda of the Tamils. Then came Adi Shankaracharya (born 686 AD) the extraordinary philosopher from Kerala, who wrote illuminating commentaries on the great Hindu texts, innumerable hymns to various deities in beautiful Sanskrit, and a number of treatises on the philosophy of non-dualism or Advaita Vedanta. He also founded four *'pithas'* or monastic centres in the four corners of India — at Shringeri in the south, Dwarika in the west, Badrinath in the north and Puri

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in the east — which have played a profound role in sustaining classical Hinduism down the ages. Shankara stressed the supreme importance of liberation achieved through knowledge which, in turn, is born of asceticism and meditation. In his system, devotion and works could only play a preparatory and subsidiary role.

In sharp contradistinction to Shankara's monistic philosophy was the theistic approach of the great Tamil scholar Ramanuja (born 1017 AD) who advocated a qualified monism and proclaimed that the way of devotion was the supreme path. The seeker must develop a devotion to God so intense that he realizes that he is only a fragment of Him and wholly dependent on His grace. Thus Ramanuja held that however high the individual soul may rise, it will always remain in some degree separate from the Divine, so that the intense inter-personal relationship can subsist for ever.

Another great south Indian *acharya* was Madhva (born 1199 AD), whose system can be described as dualistic in that he held that God and individual souls are eternally distinct, and that salvation consists not in the merger of the two but in the soul dwelling eternally close to God and enjoying the contemplation of His glory. Madhva also held a doctrine, not generally found in Hinduism, that souls who consistently indulge in evil can ultimately get so weighed down that they can be permanently expelled from the universe to a state of eternal damnation.

These great teachers and their followers wrote original commentaries upon the *Prasthana-trayi,* the three foundations of Hindu philosophy — the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagvadgita. In addition, for intellectual and academic classification, Hindu philosophy has been divided into six systems of thought, each associated with a great teacher, which are generally reduced to three categories. The *Vaisheshika* of Kanada and the *Nyaya* of Gautama form one group; the *Sankhya* of Kapila and the *Yoga* of Patanjali the second; and the *Purva Mimansa* of Jaimini and the *Vedanta* (also called *Uttar Mimansa*) of Vyasa the third. These schools are regarded as 'astika' or orthodox, because they accept the overriding authority of the Vedas, while the two other great schools of Indian philosophy, Jainism (whose twentyfourth great teacher, Mahavira, lived in the sixth century BC) and Buddhism (founded by Gautama Buddha in the same century) are regarded as 'anastika' or heterodox because they repudiate the authority of the Vedas.

The Forms of the Formless

It is necessary to point out, however, that while learned scholars proclaimed and disputed these various schools of philosophy, for the common man, the mainstay of Hinduism has always been devotion to a deity representing some aspect or incarnation of the Divine. Hinduism has a wealth of imagery, symbolism and iconography, and has produced a dazzling array of images and concepts which often baffles non-Hindus. This has led to the erroneous view, still extant in some quarters, that Hinduism is

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polytheistic. It certainly encourages the worship of many forms and symbols, but it must be understood that behind these myriad forms is the same all-pervasive divinity mirrored in a thousand different ways.

Very briefly, popular Hindu worship today revolves around three major deities — Shiva, Vishnu as himself and his major incarnations, and the Goddess. Shiva Mahadeva is the great primeval lord, and there is reason to believe that he is of a pre-Aryan origin because on the still undeciphered seals of the Indus Valley civilization (*c.* 5000-3000 BC), there is a figure seated crosslegged with several of the features associated with Shiva. Shiva is invariably worshipped along with a *lingam,* a powerful symbol representing the creative force behind all manifestation. He is generally portrayed as a resplendent ascetic sitting in meditation on a mountain peak, his body smeared with ashes, deadly snakes entwined around his neck and the sacred Ganges flowing from his matted locks. He is also worshipped in his role as the cosmic dancer, Nataraja, whose dance symbolizes the eternal wheel of the cosmos where millions of worlds are destroyed every moment and millions other spring into existence to the beat of the eternal rhythm. Indeed the magnificent image of the dancing Shiva represents one of the high watermarks of human art.

Despite his fearsome appearance, Shiva (the very word means 'auspicious') is easy to please Ashutosha and is generous with his boons even to the titans who often misuse them. He is neither born nor does he die, being the Master of birth and death. In south India, there is a tradition in which Shiva is believed to have appeared in human form on several different occasions, either to help his devotees or to impart esoteric teachings. He is the Mahayogi, the great ascetic, and the patron-saint of those practising yoga. In Kashmir, a school of philosophy known as Kashmir Shaivism developed around a highly philosophical interpretation of which the major work *Tantraloka* is by the great tenth-century acharya, Abhinavagupta.

Shiva is the third God of the Hindu trinity — Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer — but again it must be remembered that these are not three different gods but three aspects of the same divine being. This is beautifully portrayed in the magnificent monolithic sculpture of 'Trimurti' on the Elephanta island off the coast of Bombay. One of the world's great artistic creations, this massive sculpture shows clearly the three aspects integrated in a single, divine entity. In fact, the great art of India provides as useful a way of approaching an understanding of the theistic concepts as the texts themselves. Apart from sculpture and painting, the great classical dance-forms of India, particularly the Bharata Natyam, can bring to life concepts which may appear abstruse and unidimensional when approached purely through the written word.

Vishnu is depicted as lying on a great serpent that floats on the vast, endless ocean of milk, the 'kshirasagara'. In this form he is worshipped in many temples, specially in the south, but elsewhere in India he is more

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widely worshipped in two of his most popular incarnations associated with the two great epics — Sri Rama and Sri Krishna. Indeed these two names have carried the undying message of Hinduism to billions of men and women for thousands of years now, not only in India but wherever the Hindu cultural impact has been felt in the world. Sri Rama is depicted with a bow in hand, accompanied by his noble wife Sita, his faithful brother Lakshmana, and his devoted follower the monkey-headed Hanuman. Sri Krishna is depicted in numerous forms, commencing with his early childhood as a baby, Bala Krishna, and culminating as the charioteer of Arjuna, Partha-sarathi. But his most popular and appealing form is as a beautiful cowherd youth, Gopala Krishna, dark and resplendent, standing with one foot crossed over the other and playing his magic flute. He is generally worshipped along with Radha, the shepherdess who has come to symbolise the essence of the Krishna cult of devotion. Vishnu is also worshipped in some of his lesser known incarnations such as Narsimha, the man-lion, who appeared to rid the world of the demon-king Hiranyakashyapu and save his son, the great boy-devotee Prahlada.

The third major focus of devotion in India is the goddess in her numerous forms. She is worshipped as Parvati, the consort of Shiva; Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu; Sita and Radha along with Sri Rama and Sri Krishna. But, and this is a point of considerable significance, she is not only worshipped as a consort, but in her own right as the essence of power and beauty; as Durga with 18 arms riding a lion and scattering the demon hordes like chaff; as Kali the fierce, naked goddess standing upon a corpse and drinking the blood of her freshly slain enemies; as Saraswati, the goddess of art, poetry and music, the patron-goddess of all learning and wisdom. The worship of the great Mother is, of course, known throughout the world in one form or another, but it is in Hinduism that she appears in all her splendour.

There is a Pauranic myth about the birth of Durga which is full of symbolic significance. Once a great demon, the buffalo-headed Mahishasura representing the evil forces of brute materialism, succeeded in defeating all the gods ('devas', the shining ones) and established his supremacy over the whole creation. The gods were in despair, because despite all their efforts, they could not vanquish this terrible monster. At last they gathered together on a mountain peak and decided to pool their divine powers. Each god contributed his own power symbolised by a weapon, led by the lord of the gods, Indra. At the end of the great ritual, when all the divine powers had been pooled, there arose a dazzling light which spread its glory throughout the three worlds, and in the midst of the light appeared Durga, the great goddess, with a weapon in each of her 18 arms and riding a ferocious tiger. She then gave battle to Mahishasura, and after a terrible conflict lasting nine days and nine nights, she finally slew him and rid the world of this great terror. These nine nights, the 'Navaratri', are still celebrated every year by Hindus as symbolising the victory of divine power over the forces of evil.

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In addition to Shiva, Vishnu and the Goddess, there are numerous other deities who are the object of devotion and worship by Hindus down to the present day. These include the elephant-headed Ganesha, remover of obstacles, whose worship is essential before any auspicious undertaking can begin; Kartikeya or Subramaniam, the younger son of Shiva and Parvati who is widely worshipped in south India as a young boy with a spear, riding a peacock; Hanuman, the devoted follower of Sri Rama who despite his simian appearance is wise and powerful; Dattatreya, the three-headed deity who is the patron-saint of yogis engaged in esoteric practices; and Ayappan, a south Indian deity, believed to be the result of a union between Shiva and Vishnu in his female form as Mohini. Surya, the sun-god, is known as the 'pratyaksha' deva, the visible god, and is generally worshipped through the famous gayatri mantra. Curiously, Brahma, the first god of the Hindu trinity, has only one temple in Pushkar dedicated to him in the whole of India, his worship having evidently fallen into disuse along with that of the other Vedic gods such as Indra and Varuna.

Yoga

An important point to remember is that the worship of these various deities is by no means mutually exclusive. While each Hindu usually has a special family deity — the 'Ishta-devata' — he often worships three or four different deities during his daily prayers, and pays homage to any deity in a temple he may visit. Also apart from anthropomorphic deities, some Hindus in addition use certain symbols for purposes of meditation. The most important of these is the Aum (ॐ), which is described in the scriptures as being the audio-visual symbol of Brahman itself, and is endowed with a wealth of symbolism. An entire Upanishad — the Mandukya — has been devoted to the word Aum.

Meditation on the symbol and sound of Aum is an important aspect of Yoga, a word that has gained much currency of late throughout the world but is generally imperfectly understood. As has been mentioned earlier, Yoga implies the joining or yoking of human consciousness to the Divine Being, and in this sense it can be applied to the four major paths of spiritual attainment. In a more specialized sense, yoga involves physical and mental disciplines directed at control over mental and bodily functions, specially breathing. The classic text of this Yoga is the celebrated *Yogasutra* of Patanjali, one of the world's great religious classics.

The sutras or aphorisms of Patanjali lay down an eightfold path Ashtanga-yoga of physical, psychological and moral discipline that, if properly adhered to under the guidance of a qualified teacher, results in the consciousness of the seeker being gradually raised until the Atman shines forth in its pristine glory as pure consciousness. This path also involves arousal of the 'Kundalini Shakti' or serpent-power, believed to be located at the base of the human spine. As this power rises through a series of occult centres or 'Chakras' located in various parts of the body, the consciousness

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is correspondingly elevated, until finally it bursts into the highest chakra at the top of the brain — the 'Sahasrara' or thousand-petalled lotus where the merger between the Atman and the Brahman takes place and the seeker is plunged in the highest bliss. This elevated state, known as 'Samadhi', is the goal of all yogic practices.

Numerous other texts on various aspects of yoga are to be found in Hindu literature, all basing themselves upon the foundations laid by Patanjali. These include the 'tantras' or esoteric texts which deal with the various practices and techniques of 'Kundalini' arousal and acquisition of psychic powers. These miraculous powers, or 'siddhis', are accepted as an important aspect of yogic practices, but their misuse or even excessive demonstration is frowned upon as a hindrance to the achievement of the supreme goal. Through the ages, as today, there have been in India a fair number of persons who possess these powers, and miracle-mongering has always been an occupational hazard for yogis which it is not always easy to avoid.

An important aspect of Hinduism, whether it is yoga or any other system of philosophy, discipline or teaching, is the critical importance that is assigned to the 'guru' or teacher. The guru in the Hindu tradition is to be venerated even more than one's parents, because while our physical parents give us physical life, it is the guru who brings about the crucial spiritual rebirth whereby alone can man fulfil his cosmic destiny. This notion, which appears to many to be somewhat exaggerated, will become clearer when it is understood that the human guru is but a symbol of the divine power that already resides within us. The word 'guru' itself means dispeller of darkness, and by bringing the light of spiritual wisdom into the material darkness of normal human consciousness, the guru indeed performs a unique and priceless function.

Needless to say, in Hinduism, as in so many other religions, there is the usual quota of charlatans and even criminals masquerading under the guise and habit of spiritual teachers. Generally, a person gets the sort of guru he deserves, and there is a well established tradition that when the disciple is ready, the guru will appear. In the Mundaka Upanishad two essential qualifications of a true guru are laid down, both of which must be fulfilled if a person is really to occupy that elevated status. The guru must be 'shrotriya', learned in the scriptures, and 'brahmanishtha' established in the Brahman or divine consciousness. Hinduism believes that spiritual attainment is not possible without a guru, although sometimes in place of a human guru, a book or scripture may suffice. There have also been instances in which people have been initiated by some high being through a dream rather than in the flesh.

THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT

Despite great turmoil for many centuries in north India due to Muslim incursions and conquests, Hinduism continued to develop. Indeed an important aspect of its development during Muslim rule was a twofold

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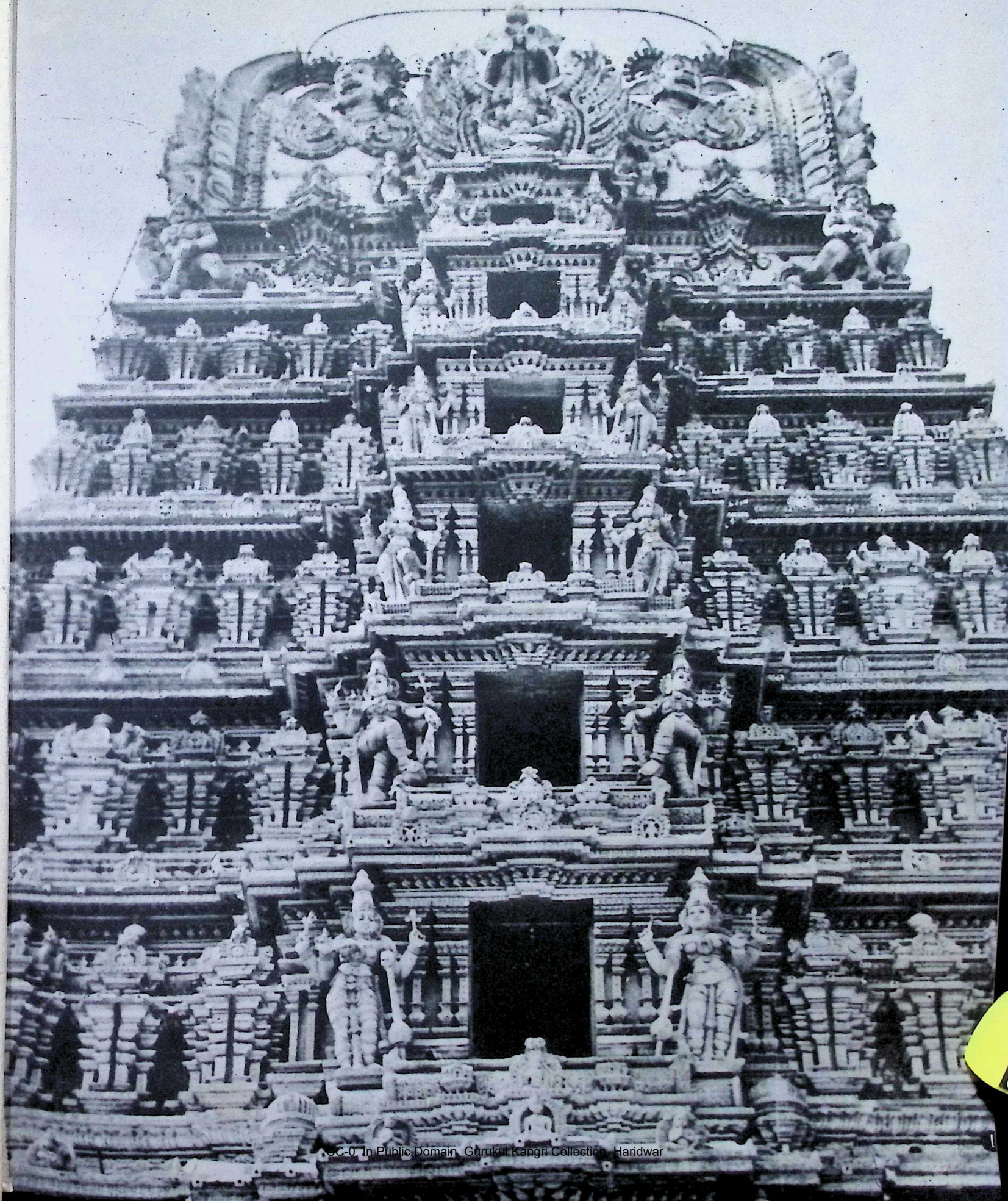

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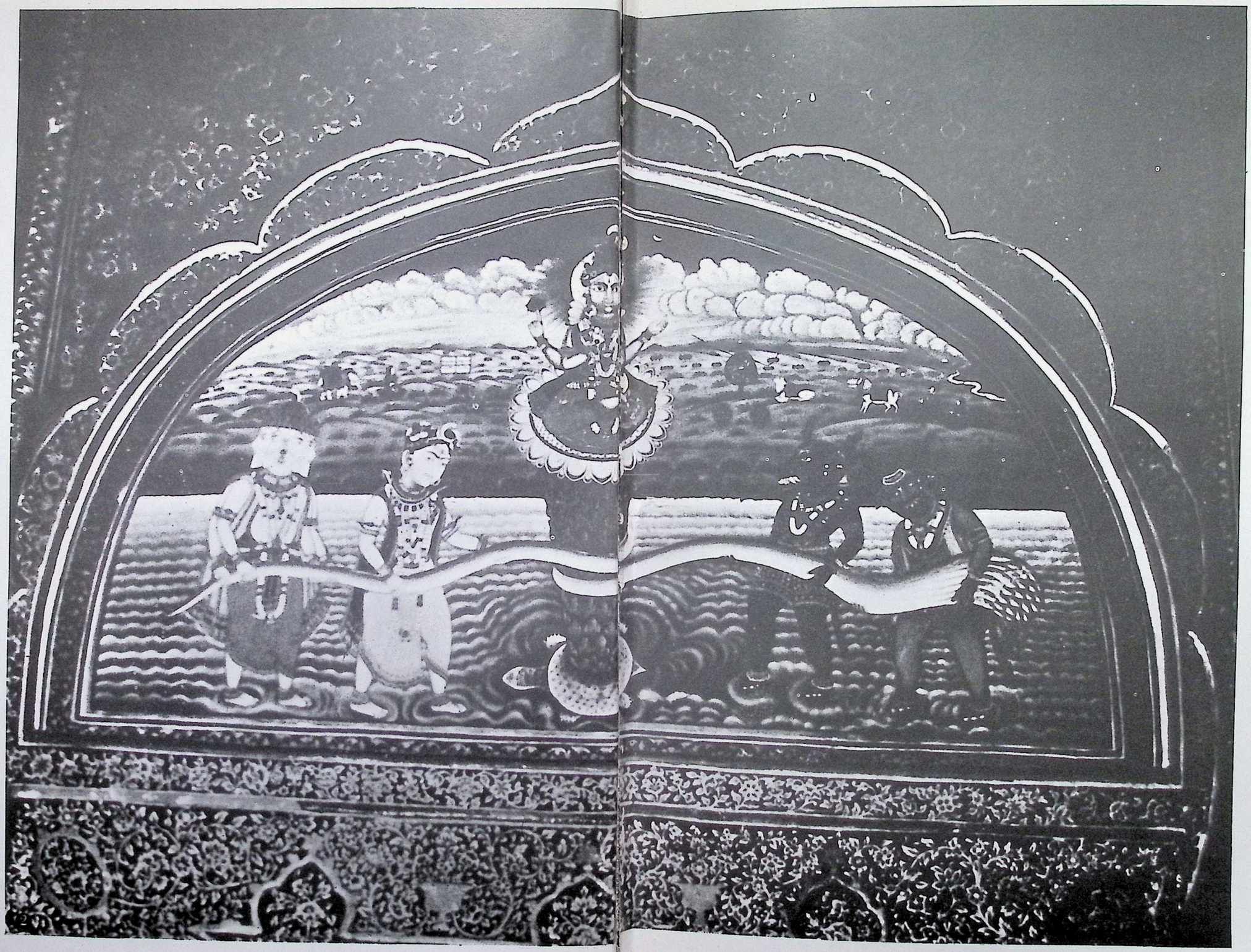

1. Chamundeshwari Temple, Mysore.
2. Amrit Manthan, the churning of the milky ocean—temple wall painting from the Punjab.

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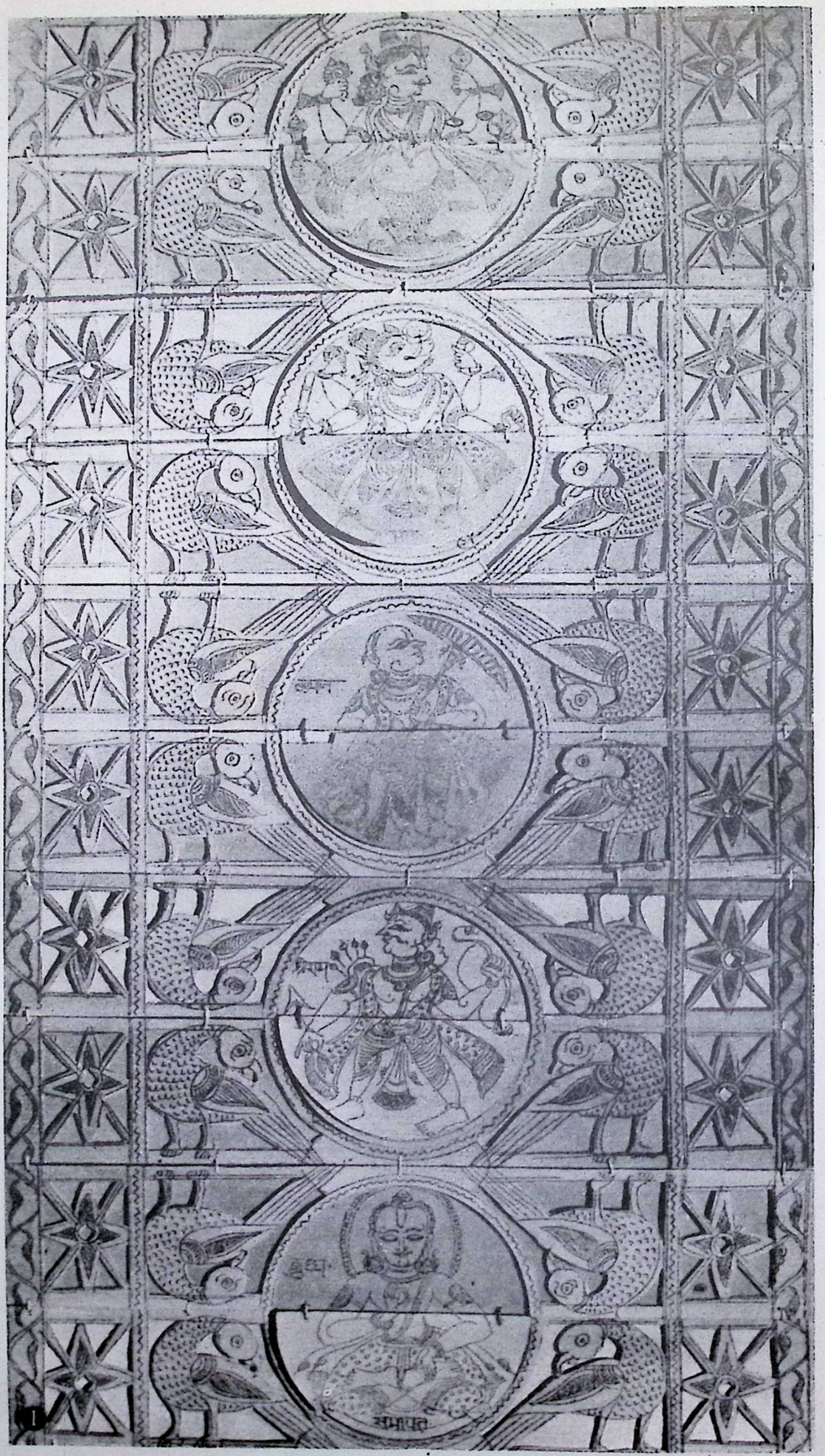
I

III

V

VII

IX



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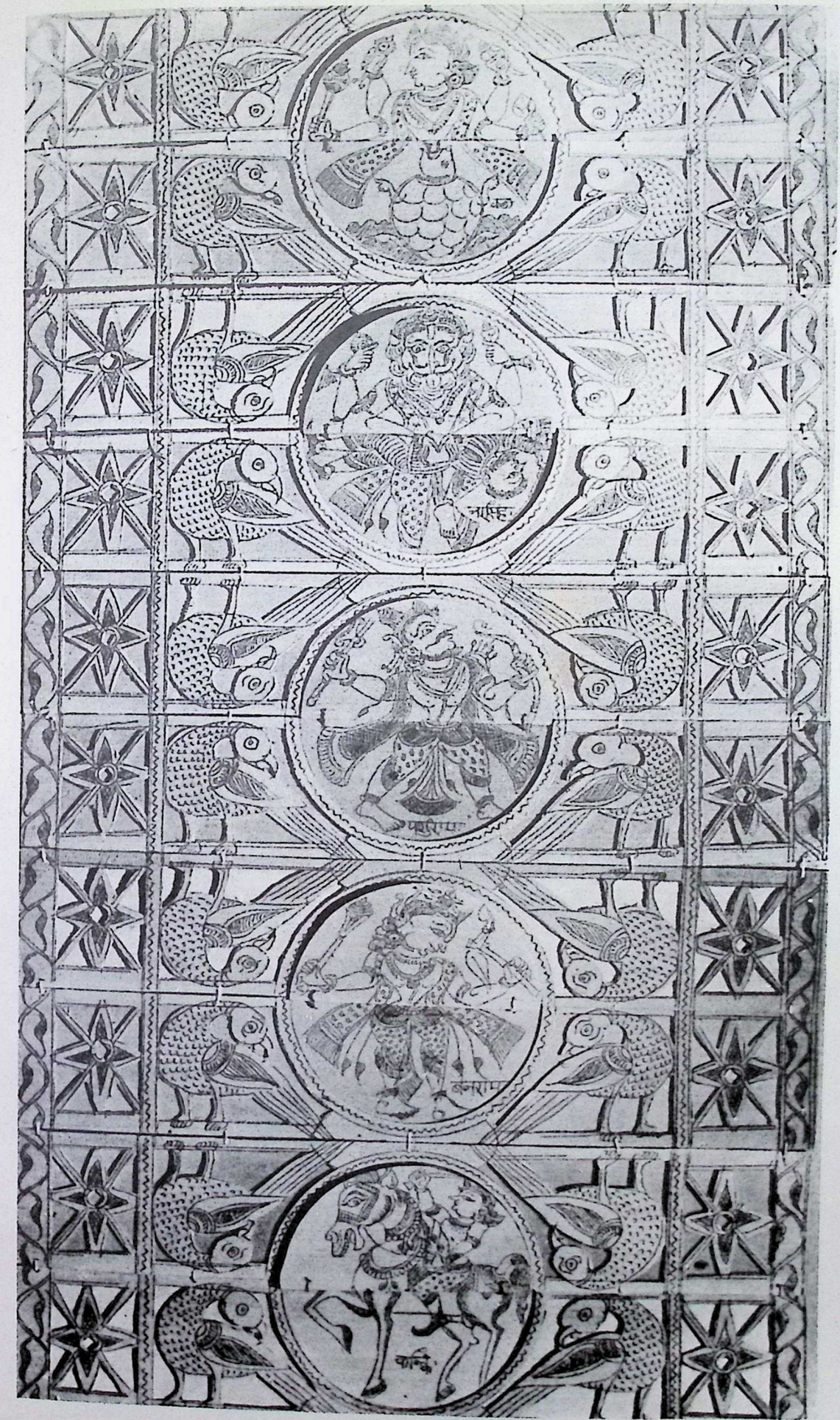

II

IV

VI

VIII

X

1 & 2, Dashavatar—Ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu - I to X. Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Sri Rama, Vanrama, Buddha and Kalki—palm leaf painting from Orissa.

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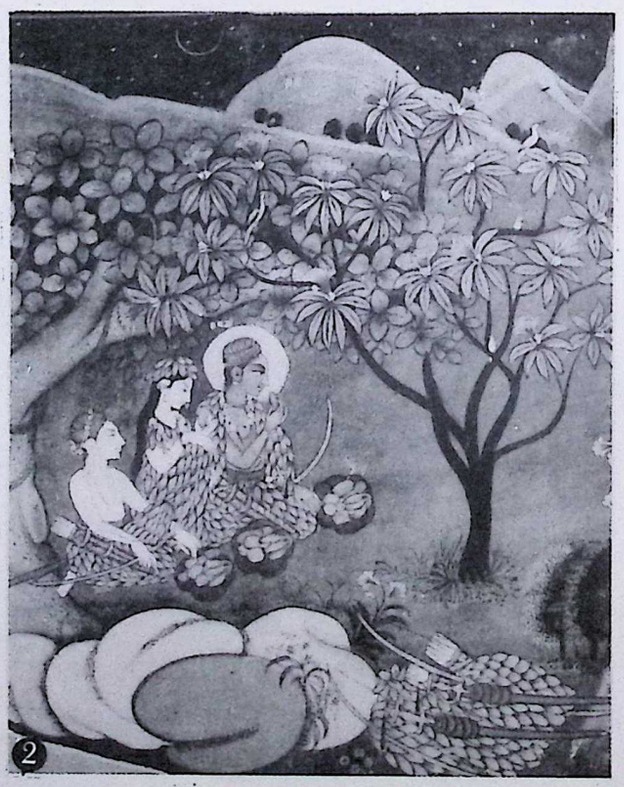
1. Krishna preaching the Gita to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra—Pahari painting.

2. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana during their exile from the epic Ramayana—Miniature Painting.



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1. Mahishasura-mardini, the goddess Durga vanquishing the demon-buffalo.
2. Parvati, consort of Shiva (12th century A.D.).
3. Saraswati, goddess of wisdom, learning and the fine arts (10th century A.D.).

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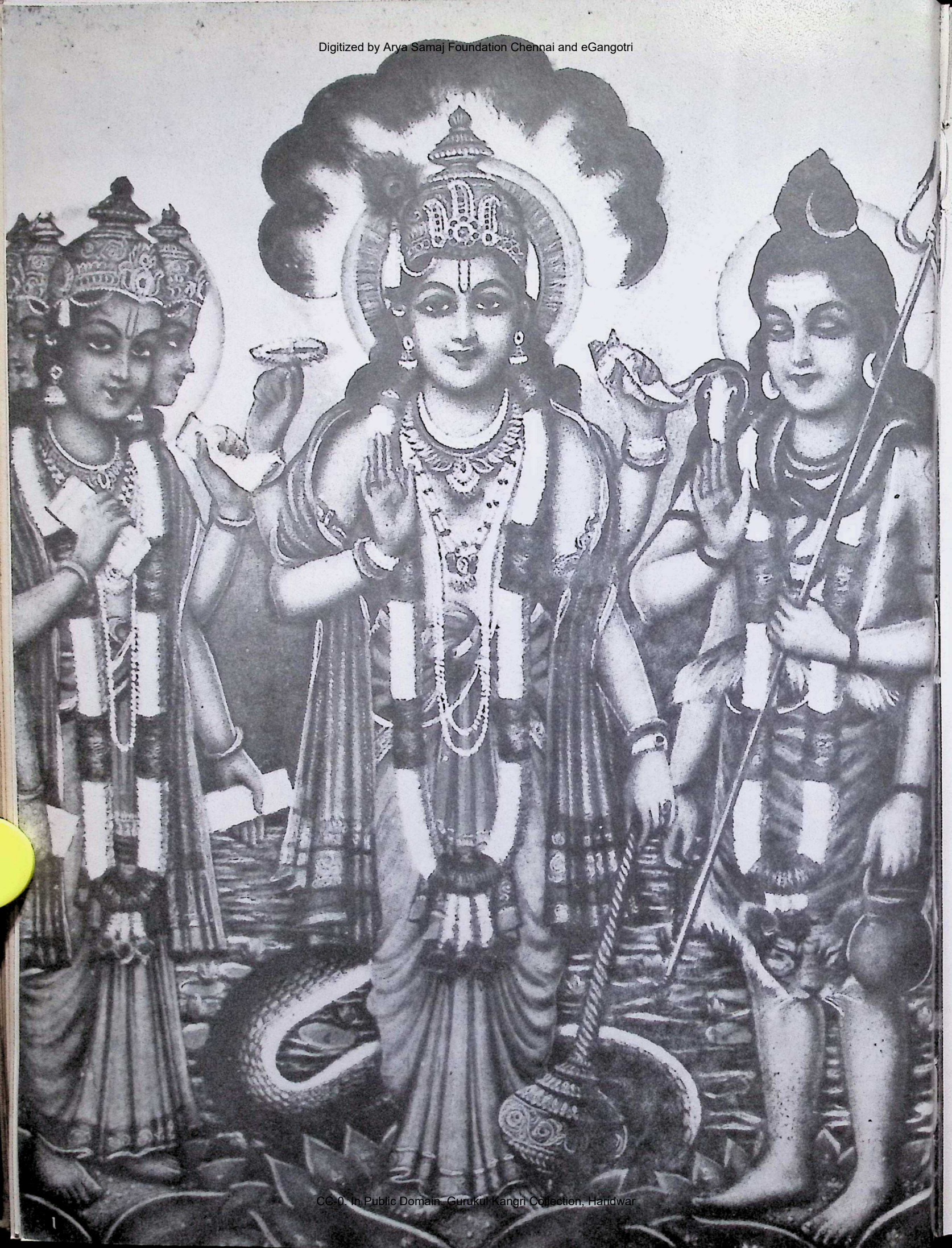

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2

1. The trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.
2. Nataraja—Shiva as Lord of the Dance.

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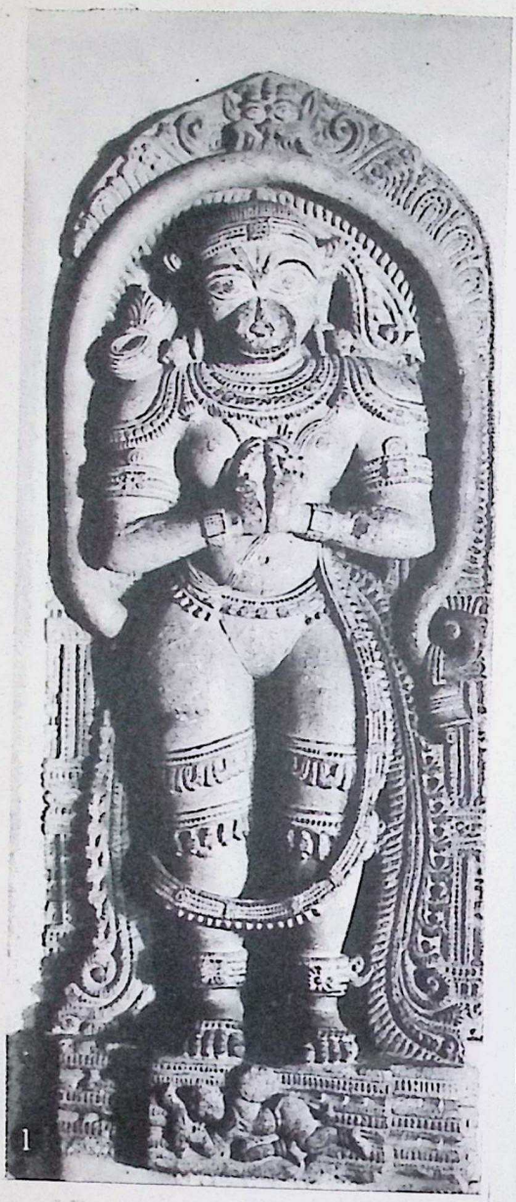
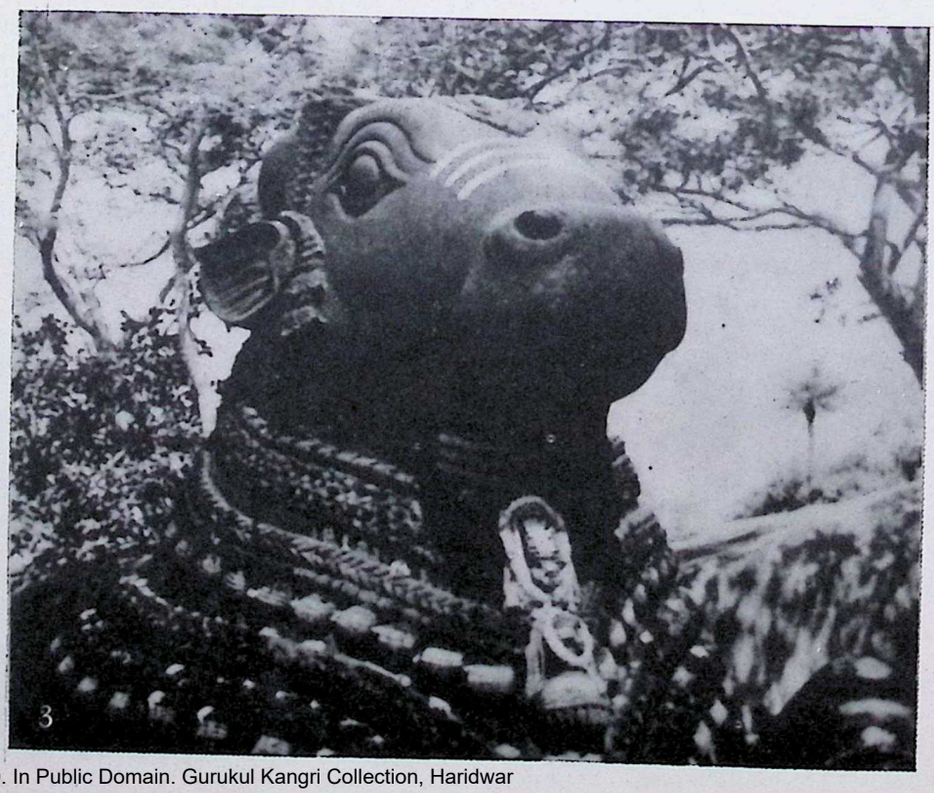


1. Hanuman, the devotee of Sri Rama (12th century A.D.) worshipped for his strength.
2. Shiva as Trimurti, Elephanta Caves.
3. Nandi, the sacred bull, vahana (vehicle) of Shiva.
4. Pongal festival, Kerala—the divinity and grace of the cow.



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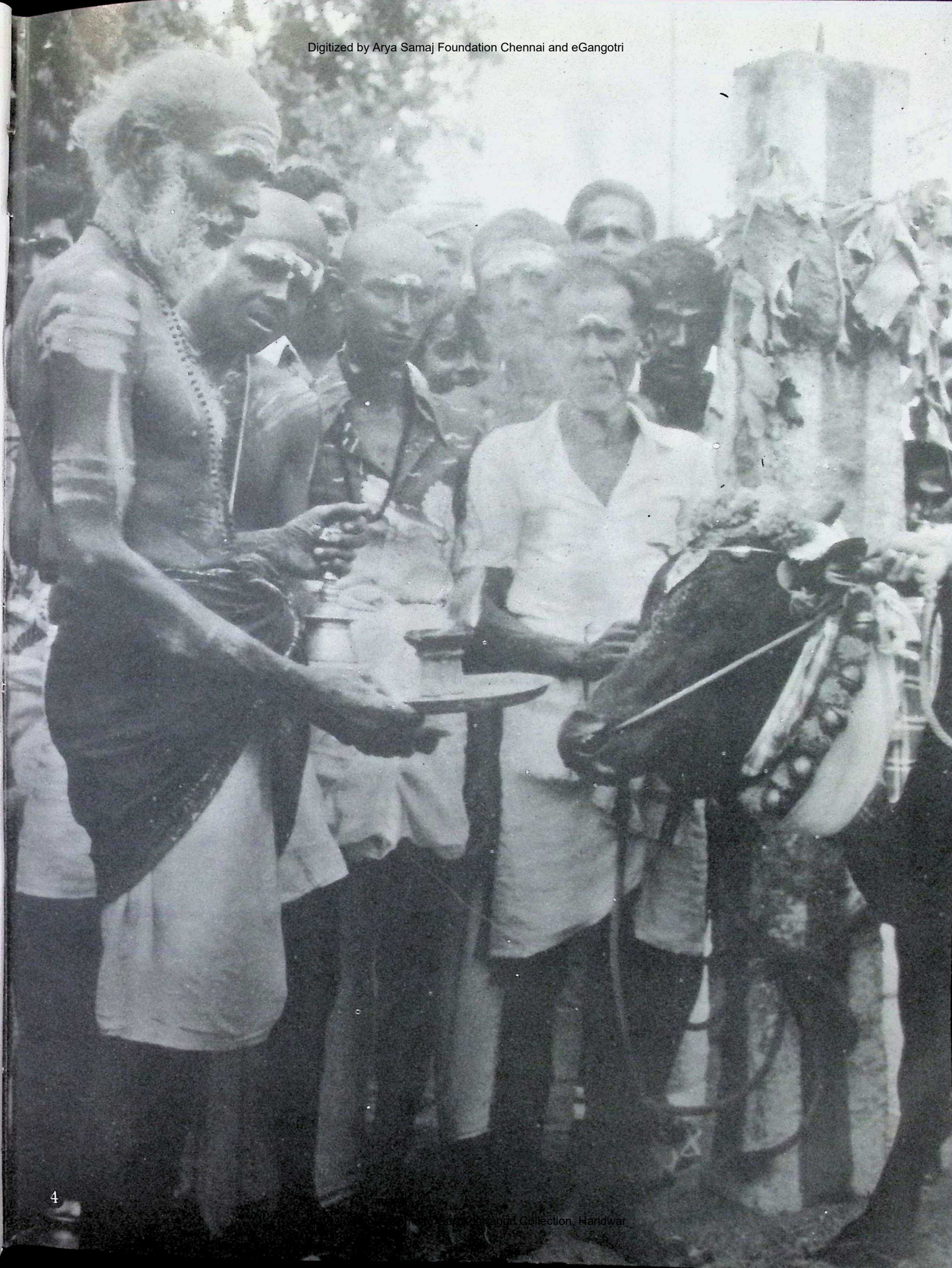

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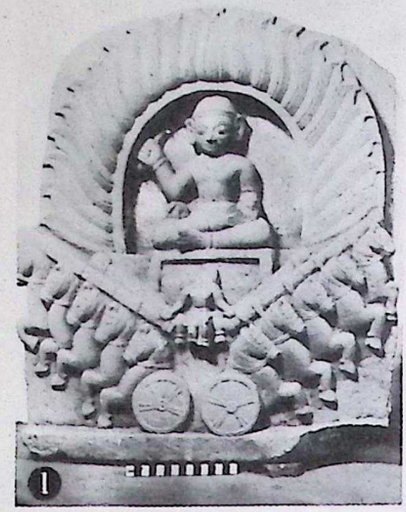
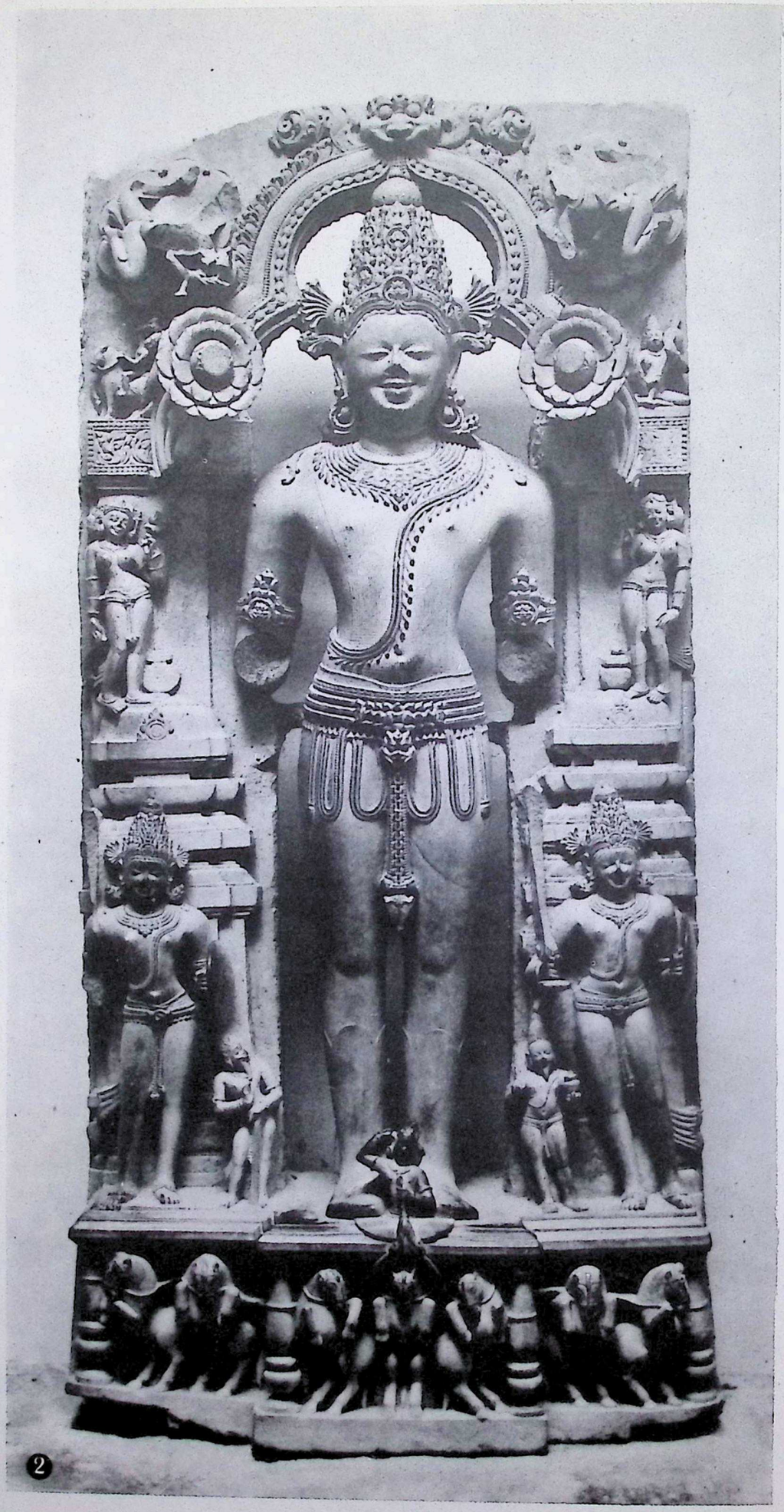


1. Chandra, the Moon-god (10th century A.D.).
2. Surya, the Sun-god (7th century A.D.).



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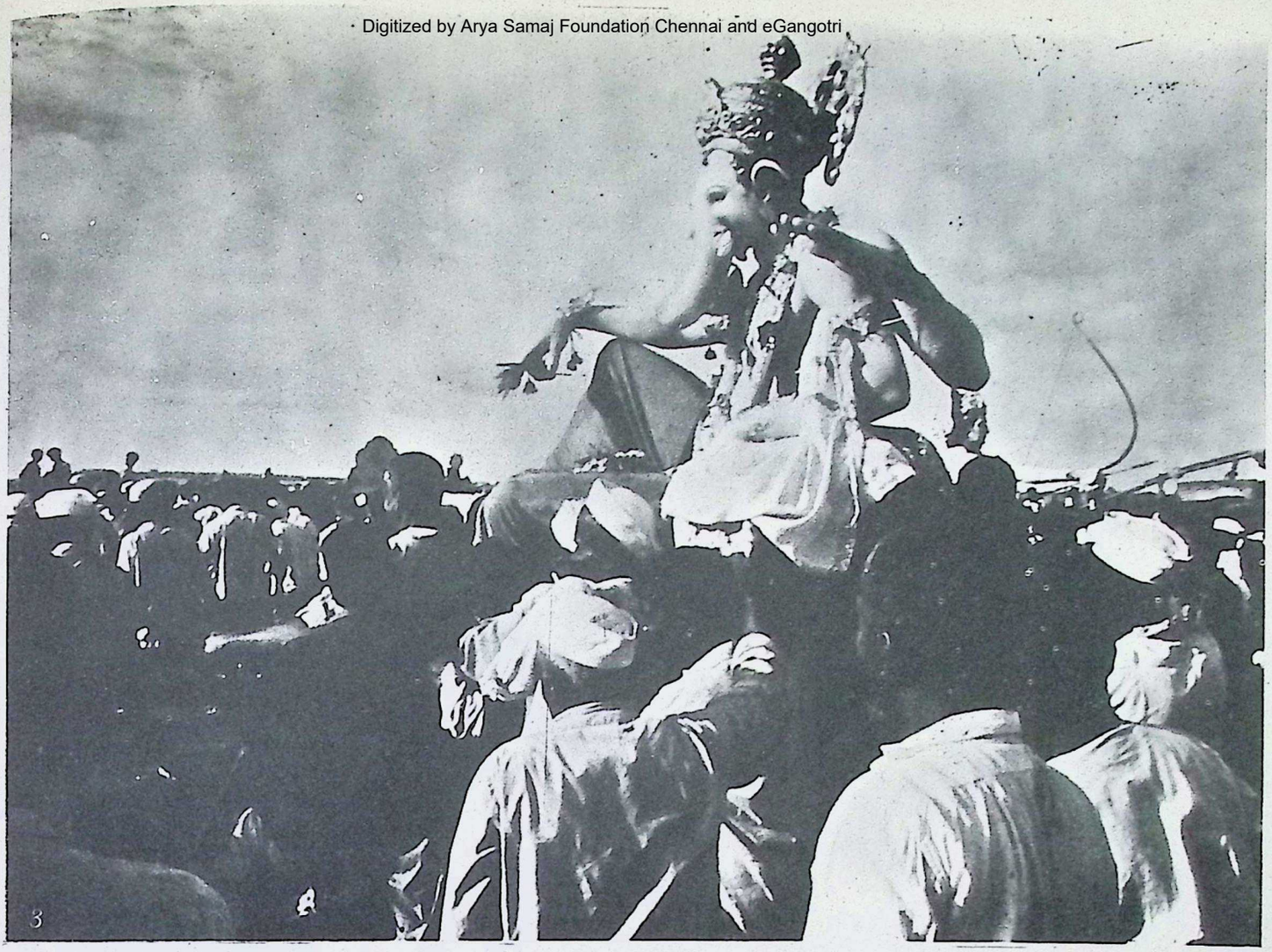

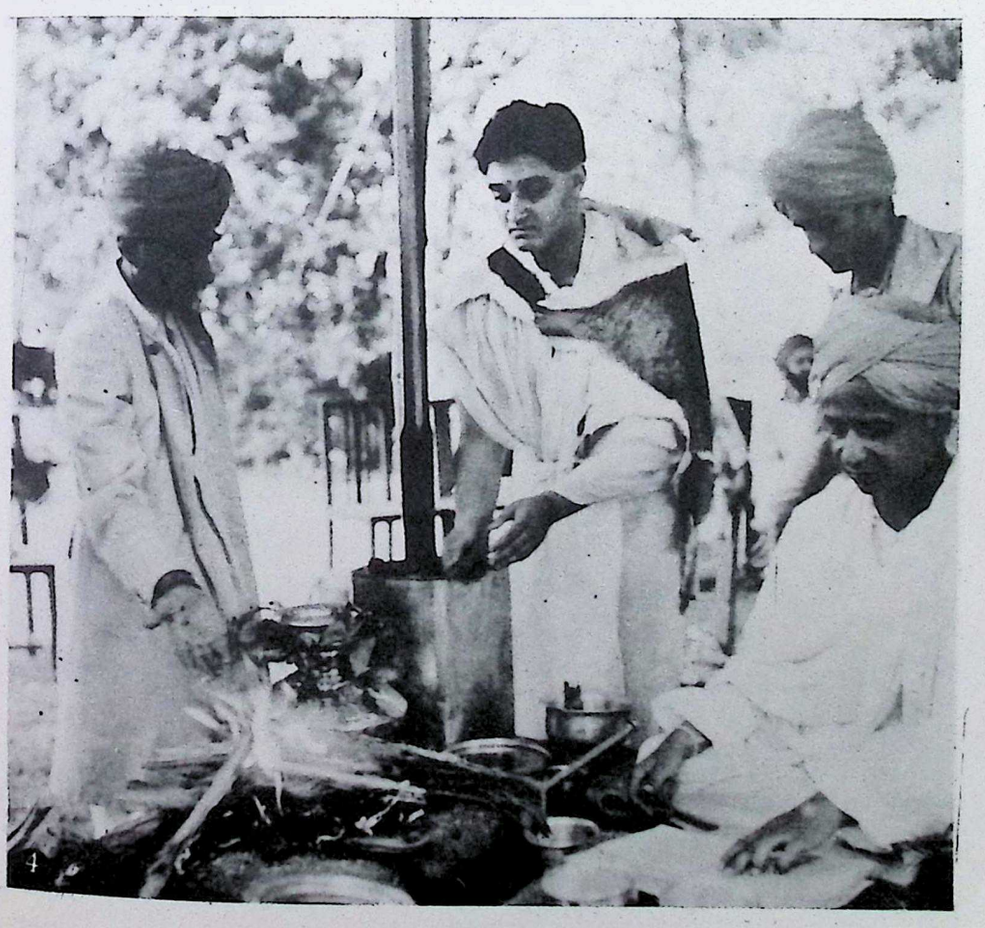

3. Ganesh Utsava, festival dedicated to the Vighneshwara, remover of obstacles.
4. The sacred thread ceremony—the author at age eighteen.

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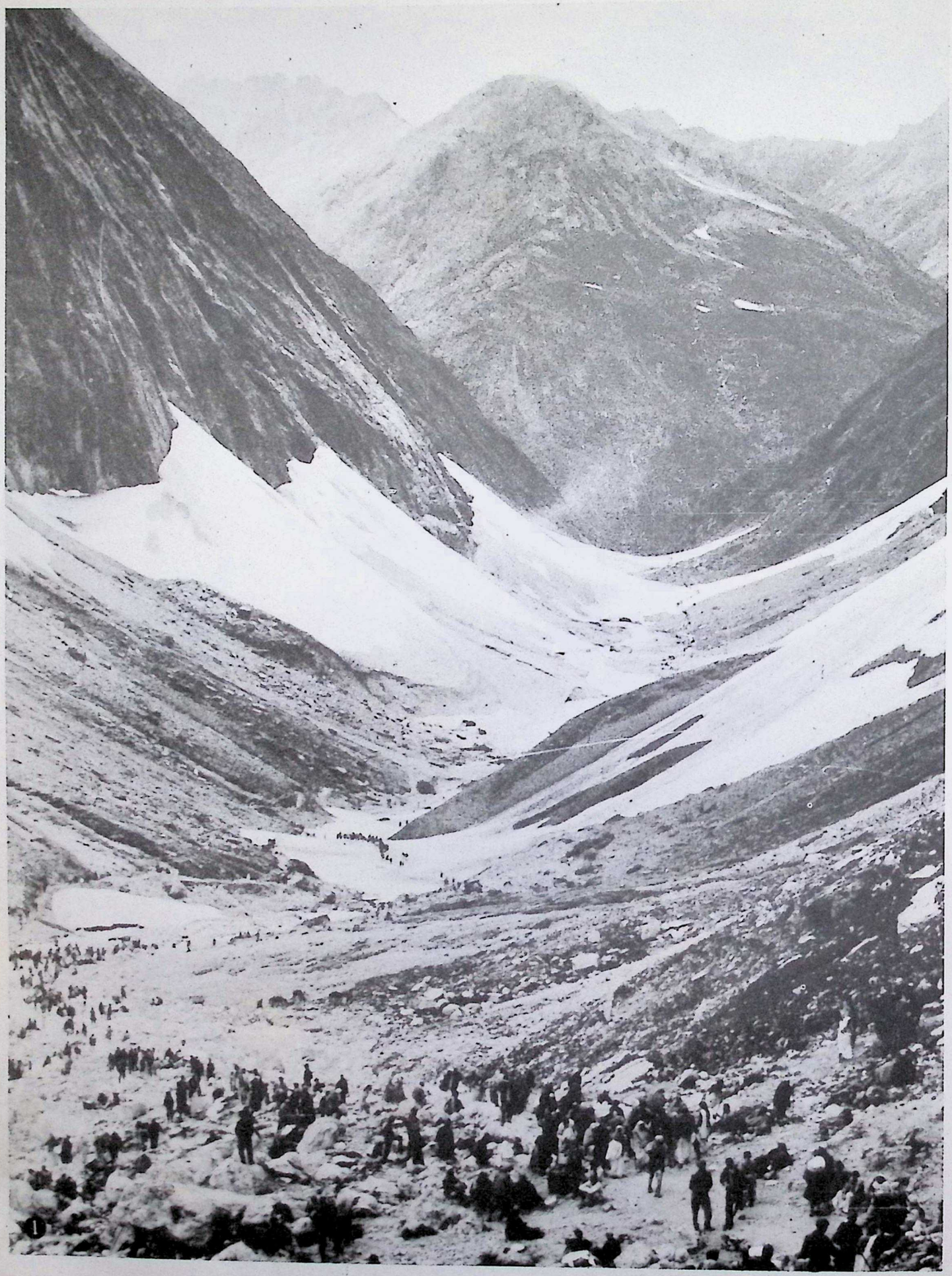

1. Pilgrims on way to the Amarnath cave in the Kashmir valley.
2. Durga puja celebrations, Calcutta.

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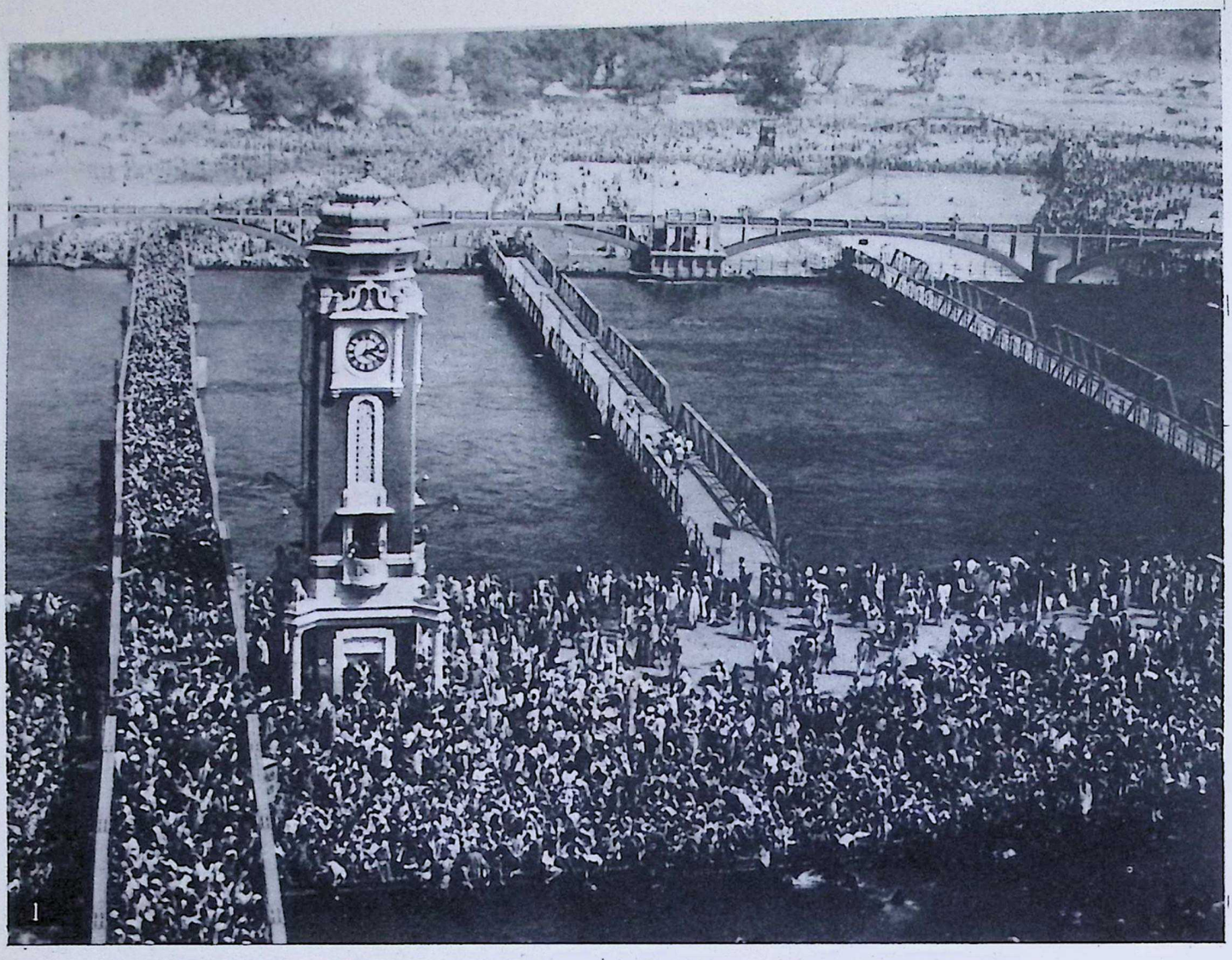

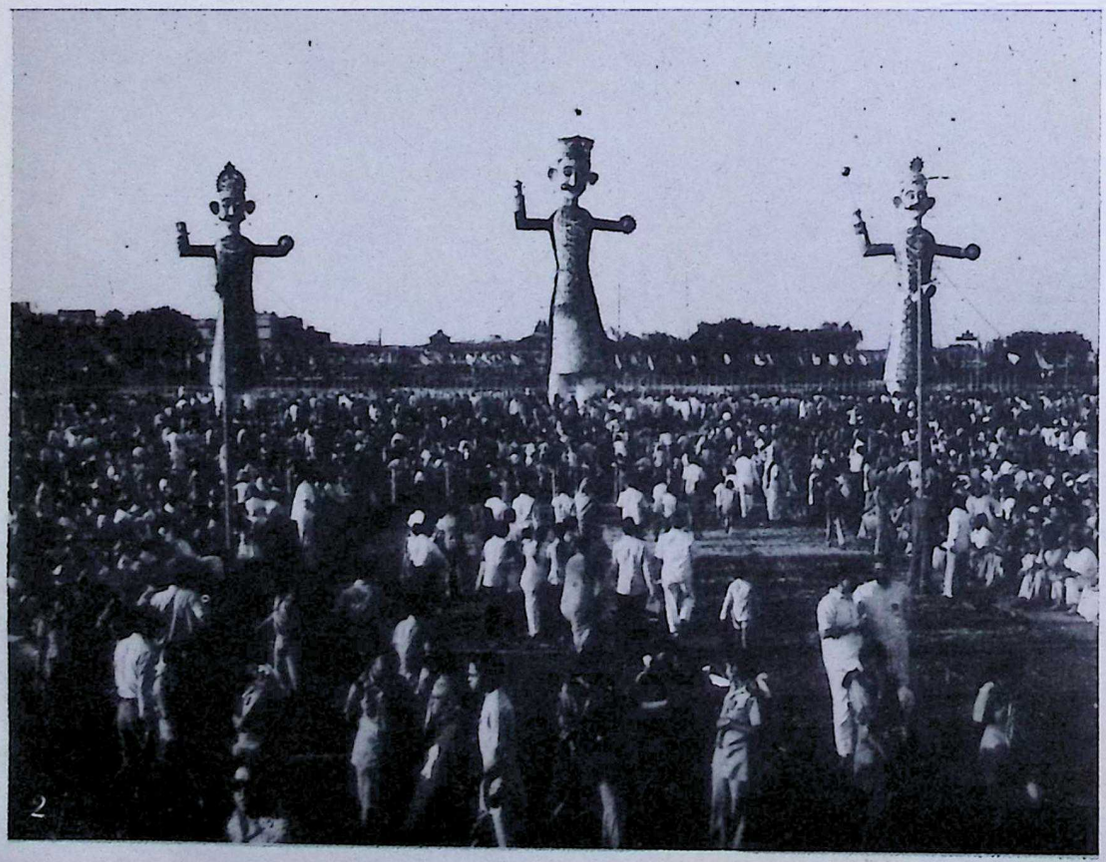

1. Kumbh mela, Haridwar.
2. Dussehra celebrations, the triumph of good over evil.

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movement: a turning inwards to preserve itself in the face of widespread, often severe, persecution by the Muslims whose religion abhorred many of the practices central to Hinduism, specially image-worship; and a syncretic movement in which at the mystical level there could be a synthesis between the two faiths. Both these factors led to a tremendous devotional revival which has collectively come to be known as the 'Bhakti' movement, one of the most interesting in the long and eventful history of Hinduism.

Throughout the Middle Ages there arose a series of extraordinary saint-singers who preached the gospel of divine love and ecstasy. While previous Hindu teachings had been almost exclusively in Sanskrit, this new movement broke away from the rigid and conservative Brahmin-dominated tradition, and for the first time used the regional languages and dialects to propagate their message. This also involved a revolt against the rigid caste restrictions and taboos that had become a negative feature in classical Hinduism. The saint-singers not only came from all castes and communities, including Muslims and some remarkable women, but also their message was addressed to the common man, irrespective of caste or creed.

In Islam also, as against the *ulema* or clergy, there has always been a mystical tradition of seekers intoxicated with the love of God. These were known as Sufis, and it was with the Sufi tradition that the Hindu Bhakti movement developed close affinity. The first major Sufi teacher to come to India was the great Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (born 1142). He arrived in Delhi towards the end of the twelfth century and finally settled in Ajmer where he had many disciples, both Hindu and Muslim. His great shrine there, the Dargah Shareef, is today probably the most important centre of Muslim pilgrimage outside Mecca and Medina and draws numerous Hindu pilgrims also every year. On the Hindu side, the first great figure of medieval mysticism was Ramananda (*c.* 1370-1440). Although a disciple of Ramanuja, Ramananda moved away from traditional orthodoxy, challenged caste divisions and began preaching in Hindi rather than in Sanskrit. One of his most illustrious disciples was Guru Ravidas who was a cobbler by profession. By sheer dint of his spiritual merit, he rose to become one of the most respected religious teachers of his time, and who still has millions of followers.

Ramananda's disciples came mainly from the lower castes, the most famous being Kabir, who is claimed both by the Hindus and the Muslims. The son of a Muslim weaver, Kabir (1440-1518) was drawn into the Bhakti movement at an early age. His songs struck at the root of religious orthodoxy, ritualism and intolerance, and he combined in himself the best of the Sufi and Bhakti traditions. One of his songs (translated by Rabindranath Tagore) contains the following stanzas:

O servant, where dost thou seek me?
O! I am beside thee.
I am neither in temple nor in mosque;

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I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailasa,
Neither am I in rites and ceremonies,
Nor in yoga and renunciation.
If thou art a true seeker
Thou shalt at once see me,
Thou shalt meet me in a moment of time.
Kabir says, 'O Sadhu, God is the breath of all breath,
There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places,
I know that they are useless, for I have bathed in them,
The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak.
I know, for I have cried aloud to them.
The Purana and the Koran are mere words;
Lifting up the curtain, I have seen.
Kabir gives utterance to the words of experience;
He knows well that all other things are untrue.

Kabir had a tremendous influence upon the India of his day. Despite the fact that he was a lowly weaver, the sheer force of his spiritual realization made him a focus of great veneration. There is an interesting, perhaps apocryphal, tradition about his death. Both the Hindus and the Muslims claimed his body, the former insisting that he be cremated and the latter that he be buried. When the shroud was removed, however, the body had disappeared and in its place was a heap of flowers. These were then divided between the contending parties; the Hindus carried off their share and cremated them with great devotion, while the Muslims buried their share with equal veneration. Thus in death, as in life, Kabir taught the gospel of spiritual communion and brotherhood between India's two largest religious communities.

Kabir had many disciples, but two teachers who were greatly influenced by him deserve special mention. The first was Nanak (1469-1538) who went on to found the Sikh faith. He constantly emphasized that in the sight of God, 'there was no Hindu and no Mussalman,' and many of the hymns contained in the *Granth Sahib,* the sacred book of the Sikhs, echo this concept. Another of Kabir's followers was Dadu (1544-1603) who also founded a powerful movement based on his teachings known as Dadu-panth. He wrote many beautiful hymns, and in one of them he says:

God is my ancestor, the creator is my kinsman,
the world-guru is my caste, I am a child of the Almighty.

The Bhakti movement produced a profusion of great literature. Two figures of particular importance in the vast Hindi-speaking Indo-Gangetic plain are Tulsidas (1527-1623) and Surdas (1478-1581). Tulsidas produced the first and greatest classic in Hindi, the *Ramacharitamanasa* (holy lake of Rama's deeds), which is the story of the Ramayana retold in Hindi verse with a wealth of poetry and deep devotion. There are many versions of the Ramayana,the most important being the original Sanskrit version of Valmiki

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and the Tamil version of Kamban. But the Ramacharitamanasa has had a unique impact. For millions of Hindus in north India, it has provided for centuries the main cultural and religious foundations, and down to this day verses from it are sung in every village and town. It was this great religious classic that the indentured labourers who went from India to Fiji, Surinam, Mauritius and other plantations during colonial rule took with them, and which remains their religious umbilical cord linking them to the land of their origin. Tulsidas looks upon Sri Rama as the supreme incarnation of the Divine Being, born for the salvation of mankind and worthy of total devotion and dedication.

Surdas, considered by some critics to be an even greater poet, went blind in his early childhood. Nonetheless, he composed beautiful devotional poetry directed towards Sri Krishna. His descriptions of Krishna's childhood, his youthful pranks, his dalliance with the *gopis* (shepherdesses) of Vrindavan, his magical feats, his resplendent personality epitomizing the Divine lover who summons human souls to the golden notes of his eternal flute, are part of the great heritage of Hinduism. Both Tulsıdas and Surdas, along with a number of other devotional saints including the Pathan Raskhan, another devotee of Sri Krishna, gave a tremendous boost to popular Hinduism. At a time when Muslim rule was being established over most of India, and the older, classical orthodoxy was losing its hold upon the people's minds, the Bhakti movement once again demonstrated the resilience of Hinduism, its capacity to enable its followers to re-state and re-interpret the eternal verities in the light of changed circumstances.

In Karnataka, the great saint Purandaradasa (1480-1564) sang of the glory of God and won a vast following. Eastern India, particularly Bengal, has always been an important centre of Hinduism. The great eleventh-century poet-devotee Jayadeva, who composed one of the post-classic Sanskrit masterpieces in his poem the *Gita Govinda* relating the story of Sri Krishna, had given a great fillip to Vaishnava worship in Bengal and Orissa. An extraordinary saint called Chaitanya (1485-1534), popularly known as 'Mahaprabhu' (the great lord) and considered by his devotees to be an incarnation of Sri Krishna Himself, founded the Vaishnava movement in Bengal. A special feature of his ministry was the 'kirtans', choral singing and chanting by groups of devotees wandering from village to village and from town to town. Often the men involved in chanting would be carried away by a religious frenzy, and Sri Chaitanya himself would be thrown into a trance or fit of ecstasy as he contemplated the glory of Krishna. Although he did not write extensively, he exerted a profound influence on the subsequent development of Bengali and Oriya literature. Further east, in the Brahmaputra valley, another great teacher and reformer Shankaradeva (1449-1568) writing in Assamese had a profound influence upon the Hindus of that region. The same is true of Tukaram (1607-1649) in Maharashtra, which had earlier produced the young saint Jnaneshwara (1275-1296) whose Marathi work, the *Jnaneshwari,* is one of the great classics of Hinduism.

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No survey of the Bhakti movement, howsoever brief, can omit the names of two remarkable women who have left the impress of their attainment upon future generations. Lalleshwari (1317-1372) was a Kashmiri saint who attained God-realization at an early age, and whose life is full of legends and miraculous stories. Her utterances teach the direct path of realization through intense love of the divine, renouncing attachment to worldly possessions and family ties, and rising above the dualities of caste and creed. Thus she writes:

Shiva abides in all that is everywhere;
Then do not discriminate
Between a Hindu and a Mussalman.
If thou art wise, know thyself;
That is the true knowledge of the Lord.
I renounced fraud, untruth, deceit;
I taught my mind to see the One
In all my fellowmen.
How could I then discriminate
Between man and man
And not accept the food
Offered to me by brother man?

The other great woman figure of the Bhakti movement was Mirabai (1450-1512), a Rajput princess who was married at an early age to the Rana of Udaipur. She had in childhood become a devotee of Sri Krishna and had dedicated her life to him. After her marriage, she continued to devote her entire time to the worship of Krishna, incurring the displeasure of her husband, who tried even to poison her. By Krishna's grace, however, the cup of poison turned into honey as she danced in ecstasy before the image of the Lord. Mira subsequently renounced her worldly life, and wandered through India singing her beautiful compositions, which are among the most moving devotional songs of Hinduism. One of her best loved songs is the following:

Tying anklets upon her feet, Mira dances in ecstasy.
People say Mira has gone mad,
Her mother-in-law says she has disgraced the clan,
The Rana sent her a cup of poison
Which Mira, laughingly, drank.

I have myself become the eternal maid-servant of
My Narayana;
Mira's God is Giridhar, lifter of the mountain,
O Indestructible One, meet me swiftly in your
Eternal embrace.

Thus we see that in its most difficult period, Hinduism produced a glittering galaxy of saint-singers drawn from all corners of the country, who inspired millions by their devotion and poetry presented in an idiom readily understood by the masses. They were re-expressing the great Vedantic

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truths — the unity of Atman and Brahman, of the human and the divine — in a new phraseology which took the message down to the most humble villages where the majority of Hindus have always lived. Their songs remain to this day a major source of inspiration for Hindus, and while the sonorous Sanskrit chanting of the magnificent Vedic hymns can still be heard on special occasions, it is the songs of the medieval saints which echo and re-echo throughout India, in fields and forests, in villages and towns. Truly has it been said that music has the unique capacity to carry the human consciousness out of its narrow confines towards the brimming ocean of the Divine.

THE MODERN RENAISSANCE

The entire history of Hinduism, looked at from a certain angle, can be seen as a constant process of challenge and response. To each major crisis, Hinduism reacted, first by briefly withdrawing into a shell and then, with its unparalleled capacity for assimilation and regeneration, by a new resurgence. This happened with the Jain and Buddhist movements, with the early Christian missionaries and, to a lesser extent, with the Muslim advent. But with the arrival of the British, first as traders and finally as imperial rulers, Hinduism was confronted with the most critical of all the challenges it had faced in its long and eventful history.

By the time the British arrived in India, Hinduism had reached perhaps its lowest ebb. All sorts of superstitions and undesirable practices flourished in the name of religion. Caste taboos had become so rigid that Hindu society, which a thousand years earlier had sent its great missionaries to the four corners of Asia, had begun to insist on anyone returning from abroad having to undergo purificatory rites. Women, who once enjoyed an honoured position and are found in the Upanishads conversing freely with men upon the highest philosophical topics, had become virtual slaves in the joint family. Widows were treated with great cruelty, female infanticide was rife in some castes, and compulsory immolation of widows was often enforced. Theologically also, the great Vedantic truths that lay behind Hindu thought had been obscured by the jungle growth of superstition and corruption. The inspiration of the medieval saint-singers, while still prevalent, had begun to fade in the face of the political turmoil and widespread anarchy that followed the collapse of Mughal power. Indeed it was one of the darkest periods in Indian history, and it seemed that Hinduism had at last exhausted its spiritual reserves and would gradually fade away in the face of the new onslaught.

However, once again the miracle of regeneration was witnessed, and Hindu society produced a series of remarkable men who, by the sheer power of their spiritual illumination, rekindled the dying spark. In 1857, after what is commonly known as the Great Indian Mutiny but which many now prefer to call India's first war of independence, India lay crushed and prostrate at the feet of her foreign conquerors, broken not only in body but also in spirit.

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People had begun to lose faith in their cultural and religious heritage, and a miasma of spiritual darkness pervaded the land. And yet, within a short span of 90 years, India had not only risen phoenix-like from the ashes but had swept to a triumphant freedom which marked the beginning of a global process of decolonization. This achievement can to a large extent be traced to a resurgence of Hinduism. This is not to deprecate in any way the role of the other communities in India's national revival, but to highlight the fact that the majority of Indians have always been Hindus, and it is Hinduism, therefore, that predominantly set the tone of national culture in India and provided the ethos, the cultural milieu, the great backdrop, as it were, against which the drama of her history was enacted.

It was in the great movement for social reform in Hinduism that the first creative reaction to British rule manifested itself, and it was Bengal, the first province in India to feel the brunt of the British conquest, that spearheaded this cultural revival. It was here that the first of a long line of great leaders of thought and action arose, a man who has often been described as the father of modern India. Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) was a man of unusual intellectual ability, a profound scholar of Sanskrit and Persian as well as a deep admirer of British culture. He took a leading part in starting English-medium schools in Bengal, and in 1828 founded the Brahmo Sabha, later to develop under his successor Devendranath Tagore into the Brahmo Samaj. This was the first deliberate attempt in modern India to reform Hinduism and to cleanse it of the undesirable encrustation that had developed around it over the centuries.

The Brahmo Samaj, as well as its offshoots the Adi Brahmo Samaj led by Devendranath Tagore, the Brahmo Samaj of India founded by Keshub Chandra Sen in 1868, and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj founded by some of his followers in 1878, all based themselves upon the pristine authority of the Vedas, and strongly attacked idol-worship and undesirable social customs such as compulsory 'sati', immolation of widows upon their husbands' funeral pyres. The leaders of the movement, specially Sen, were considerably influenced by the style of Christian missionaries who had become active under British rule, and many of their prayer meetings were modelled upon Christian church services.

Under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj, several such movements started in other parts of India, notably the Prarthana Samaj founded in Bombay in 1867 by the great scholars M. G. Ranade and R. D. Bhandarkar. These societies, while influencing mainly the English-educated fringe of society, did play an important part in bringing a new intellectual awareness into Hindu society, and encouraged educated Hindus to re-examine their religious heritage in the light of changing conditions. The same is true of the Theosophical Society which was founded by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott in New York in 1875 and gained considerable vogue in India largely through the work of Mrs. Annie Besant. Simultaneously, the re-discovery of the ancient Indian texts by European scholars such as Max

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Müller, Ferguson and Cunningham, and the work of Western archaeologists and linguists which brought to light the remarkable achievements of the Hindu past that had virtually been lost during the centuries of foreign rule, helped to give the nineteenth century Hindu a new awareness of his rich cultural heritage and a renewed pride in his ancient religion.

All this,however, remained largely confined to the small, educated classes, awaiting a movement that would touch the heart of traditional Hinduism. This was not long in coming. A major figure in the Hindu revival was Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) who founded the Arya Samaj in 1875. Unlike the Brahmo and its offshoots, which were considerably influenced by Christianity, the Arya Samaj was militantly Hindu fundamentalist. Swami Dayananda passionately advocated a return to the pristine purity of Vedic Hinduism, and denounced with intolerant indignation the post-Vedic Hindu scriptures such as the *Puranas*. He also condemned idol worship and caste distinctions, advocated full equality for women, initiated a widespread educational campaign with special emphasis on girls' education, and launched a crusade against untouchability. Rightly described as a human dynamo, Swami Dayananda shook the structure of established Hinduism to its foundations and infused into it new blood and fresh vigour.

Numerous other reform and educational movements in Hinduism developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. For purposes of this review, however, we shall confine ourselves to a mention of five outstanding figures who have left their indelible impress upon modern Hinduism, and whose tremendous personalities have gone a long way in shaping the contours of the Hindu mind in our own century. These are Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi. Each of these men, drawn from the very heart of the Hindu tradition, reinterpreted its eternal truths in the light of their own extraordinary attainment. Between them they achieved nothing less than a comprehensive revival of the best in the Hindu tradition, and collectively represent a major force in the contemporary religious thought of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886)

Born in a poor Brahmin family in the Hooghly District, West Bengal, Gadadhar Chatterjee began showing unusual signs of religious ecstasy at a very early age. When he was 19 he came to Calcutta to live with his elder brother who had been appointed priest of a newly built temple at Dakshineshwar on the banks of the Ganga. The main shrine is dedicated to the great goddess Kali, from which Calcutta derives its name, and it was as a devotee of the goddess that Sri Ramakrishna, as he came to be called, began his astounding career of spiritual discipline and attainments. Visions, trances, ecstasies crowded in upon him, and most of his time was spent in intense spiritual rhapsodies. His agonised craving to see the Divine face to face was fulfilled, and he then proceeded under various spiritual guides to experience the whole gamut of mystical relationships

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described in the Hindu scriptures, ranging from intense emotional raptures to the supreme beatitude of the 'Nirvikalpa Samadhi' — contact with the all-pervasive, formless Brahman which is the highest goal of Vedanta. Not content with this, he proceeded to adopt the spiritual practices of Christianity and Islam, and in both cases he has recorded that they culminated in sublime spiritual experiences connected with the founders of these two great faiths.

The cumulative effect of these extraordinary phenomena was immense. By the sheer force of his spiritual attainment, Sri Ramakrishna became a beacon-light in the encircling gloom of his time. Gradually the fame of this unlettered young priest began to spread far and wide throughout Bengal. The villager and the city-dweller, the scholar and the poet, the educated and the illiterate, people from all walks of life began finding their way to Dakshineshwar. Among them were some of the greatest literary figures of contemporary Bengal, men like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Debendranath Tagore and Keshub Chandra Sen.

To all who came Sri Ramakrishna gave the same message. He exhorted them not to waste their time squabbling over this or that creed or religion, but to seek God with a pure and dedicated heart. He reaffirmed on the basis of his own spiritual experiences that all creeds and religions led ultimately to the same goal, and he expressed his teachings in a series of homely and telling parables that made them intelligible to even the most unsophisticated villager. His sayings and the story of his life remain to this day a major source of religious inspiration.

Sri Ramakrishna showed that, far from being a dying religion, as some of the newly educated intelligentsia had begun to believe, Hinduism was an inexhaustible fount of spiritual inspiration. Though he lived quietly in Dakshineshwar and seldom ventured outside the temple compound, his very presence generated a powerful current of fresh light into Hindu society. And the Bengalis, with their unusual emotional and intellectual capacities, responded eloquently to this saint. Sri Ramakrishna was indeed an apostle of divine realization, one of those rare souls whose coming heralds a spiritual revolution.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Apart from his influence upon those who occasionally visited Dakshineshwar, Sri Ramakrishna attracted to his feet a group of brilliant young disciples, several of them products of the new English schools and colleges that had been recently established in Bengal. Many of these young men had lost faith in their traditional religion and were wallowing in a sea of cynicism and spiritual despair. They found in Sri Ramakrishna a source of tremendous inspiration, a man who could banish their spiritual gloom and transform their very personalities. Outstanding among these disciples was young Narendranath Dutta, later to be famous the world over as Swami Vivekananda.

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One has to go all the way back to Socrates and Plato to find a parallel for the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda relationship. Though apparently poles apart from the master, it was the student who spread his teachings far and wide until they encompassed almost the entire world. Vivekananda was a man of remarkable qualities, gifted both with a powerful physique and outstanding intellect. Just before his death, Sri Ramakrishna designated Vivekananda his spiritual heir, and after his master's passing he took upon himself the task of knitting the disciples into a dedicated band. After wandering the entire length of India as a penniless ascetic seeking a way to propagate the ideals of his beloved master, Vivekananda heard of the Parliament of Religions that was to be held in Chicago in 1893 in connection with the World Fair. With considerable difficulty he succeeded in getting a passage to America, and after facing further hardships finally reached Chicago and enrolled himself as a delegate to the conference. His advent at the gathering had all the elements of high drama. An obscure and unknown Hindu monk, he succeeded by the very force of his personality in dominating the whole concourse which today is remembered mainly because of him. A powerful speaker with a sonorous voice and a fine command of English, Vivekananda's famous address on the first day of the Parliament created a sensation, and his subsequent speeches confirmed him as an outstanding preacher.

In his short life of thirty-nine years, Swami Vivekananda undertook what was in effect a re-statement of Hinduism in the light of the new situation that had developed during the nineteenth century. He travelled extensively in India and abroad, lecturing on the basic Vedantic principles that underlay Hinduism. He thundered against the 'kitchen religion', the ridiculous taboos and restrictive customs that had overlaid the tremendous Vedantic truths. He reaffirmed not only the divinity of God but also the inherent divinity of man. A special feature of his teachings was his keen social conscience and his intense emphasis on service of the poor and the downtrodden, the sick and the hungry. He often quoted the Rigvedic dictum of human life having a twofold aim—'Atmanomokshatham jagathitaya cha'—for the welfare of the world and the salvation of one's soul. One of his celebrated remarks is that it is an insult to preach religion to a man with a hungry stomach, and that the only way God could appear before the masses of India was in the form of bread. He stressed the primacy of spiritual life, preached a doctrine of inner strength and spiritual power which alone could free India from her material, intellectual and spiritual bondage, and stressed the essential unity of all religions.

Two features of Vivekananda's ministry merit special mention, as they had an abiding influence upon the revival of contemporary Hinduism. In 1897 he founded the Ramakrishna Math and Mission with headquarters at Belur near Calcutta. Although Hinduism had a long and distinguished monastic tradition going back to Adi Shankaracharya, the Ramakrishna Mission was a new order and its approach to the problems of contemporary

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India was based on a modern re-interpretation of the ancient doctrines. It had a special bias towards educational and medical work, and has distinguished itself in providing relief to the victims of natural calamities such as floods and famine. In this respect Vivekananda clearly modelled his organization on the pattern of the Christian missionaries who had been active in India ever since the British advent. The Ramakrishna Mission today, with numerous branches in India and abroad, continues to play a significant role in spreading the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and his great disciple.

The other feature of Swami Vivekananda's life was the contribution he made to the spread of Hindu thought abroad, specially in America. Prior to his advent, it was only a handful of Western Indologists and scholars who had any real insight into the Hindu ethos, while among the general public, there flourished all sorts of grotesque impressions regarding this great religion. Vivekananda pioneered the new awareness of Hinduism in the West. His eloquent and able presentation of the essential truths that underlay Hinduism and his broad approach of the essential unity of religions combined to make him a unique spokesman of the eternal East to the bustling technological culture of Western society.

Vivekananda had a deep conviction that India's goal was not only to achieve her own regeneration but also to give a new spiritual impetus and light to the world. Hinduism is not a proselytising religion; therefore Vivekananda was not seeking converts. Rather, he sought to state the basic principles of Vedanta and allow their inner power to work upon the minds and hearts of his listeners. Indeed he was the torch-bearer of a whole new religious movement, and the forerunner of numerous other Hindu teachers and yogis who continue to this day to work in the West. Thus both in India and abroad, Vivekananda stands as a towering figure in modern Hinduism. His advocacy of 'neo-Vedanta', as it is sometimes called, gave a new direction to traditional Hinduism and continues to have a profound influence upon contemporary religion.

Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950)

If Sri Ramakrishna was a 'Bhakta' *par excellence,* and Swami Vivekananda a 'karmayogi', Sri Ramana was in the great Hindu tradition of the 'jnanayogi'. Belonging to a middle class Brahmin family of Tamil Nadu, Ramana at the age of seventeen had a series of powerful spiritual experiences that culminated in his taking up permanent residence at the holy Arunachala Hill with the town of Tiruvannamalai at its foot. Here he gradually started attracting a group of devotees, and lived for the rest of his life as a revered saint, or maharshi, recognised by all as a powerful figure on the spiritual firmament.

Sri Ramana's teachings expound the Vedantic path of self-knowledge, and his original works as well as commentaries upon the Hindu classics all flow from the process of self-enquiry. The question 'Who am I?' is to be found in most religious traditions, because the quest for self-knowledge is

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at the heart of the spiritual endeavour. But Sri Ramana made this the cornerstone of his whole philosophy. To every question he would respond by asking a counter question — 'Who is it that asks?' Thus when the body, the senses, the mind are all negated, the real 'I' begins to shine forth in all its glory.

This process of spiritual introspection was presented by Sri Ramana with great clarity, and he also taught a process of 'pranayama' or breath-control that would assist the seeker to still the modifications of the mind and focus the psychic energy upon asking that single question 'Who am I?'. He likened this to the flaming brand that is used to light a great fire; it not only sets the entire material ablaze but also consumes itself in the process. Thus Sri Ramana taught that the question 'Who am I?', if properly and persistently asked, had the capacity to destroy all delusion and ultimately itself disappear with the dawn of spiritual realization.

Unlike Vivekananda, Sri Ramana never concerned himself with social service or reform movements. He seldom ventured outside his abode at Arunachalam, and yet such was his spiritual presence that he commanded veneration from all sides. The thousands who trekked to see him were often content to do just that, because in the Hindu tradition even the sight of a holy person — 'darshana' — has its own spiritual merit. Sri Ramana had an extra-ordinary presence. Quite unconcerned with outer events, he was as one permanently centred in the Brahman, and his words came not from intellectual brilliance but from a perfect inner assurance. Like Sri Rama-krishna before him, he was a living proof of the spiritual power of Hinduism. It is said that the night he passed away, after undergoing a long and painful ailment with no sign of suffering or complaint, a bright comet moved across the sky and shone for a while in splendour above Arunachalam before dis-appearing behind the holy mountain.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)

Born on 15 August 1872 in Calcutta, Aurobindo Ghosh was sent to school in England at the age of seven. There, first at the Manchester Gram-mar School, then at St. Paul's in London and finally at King's College, Cambridge, he underwent a full educational career covering 14 years, during which he passed the classics tripos in the first division and won college prizes for English and literary ability. He returned to India in 1893 at the age of 21, and entered Baroda State service as professor of English, then vice-principal and later principal of the Baroda College.

Gifted with a brilliant mind and deep psychic power, and aglow with fervent patriotism nourished while in England on the writings of the Irish Sinn Fein movement and Italian Risorogimento, Aurobindo soon began taking a keen interest in the newly developing freedom movement in India. In 1885 an Englishman, Allen Octavian Hume, founded the Indian National Congress, and soon there developed two clear trends of thinking in this great organisation, the 'moderates' who aimed at gradual transfer of power,

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and the 'extremists' whose ideal was full freedom at once. Sri Aurobindo soon became a leader of the extremists along with Lokmanya B.G. Tilak, and in 1905, when the British pushed through the highly controversial partition of Bengal, he quit his Baroda job and plunged into the national movement.

For five years, from 1905 to 1910, Aurobindo shone like a meteor on the political firmament. His brilliant editorials in the *Bande Mataram* and the *Karmayogin*, patriotic journals he edited, represent some of the most outstanding political journalism in the English-speaking world. His political philosophy was deeply rooted in the Hindu tradition of mother-worship, particularly pronounced in Bengal. Drawing his inspiration from the famous Bengali novel *Anand Math* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee written half a century earlier, and in particular from the poem 'Bande Mataram' (Hail to thee, Mother) contained therein, Aurobindo developed a comprehensive political philosophy. The key concept was the divinity of the motherland, which he idealized as the goddess 'Bhavani Bharati', and flowing from that the concept of nationalism not simply as a political credo but as a spiritual imperative. The spiritual nationalism expounded by him had an electrifying effect upon the youth of Bengal and other parts of India at that crucial juncture, and though the movement did not meet with immediate success, it brought about for the first time a mass involvement and left an indelible impress upon the Indian freedom movement.

While at Baroda Sri Aurobindo had begun following some yogic practices, and during the Bengal agitation he was arrested in the celebrated Alipur Bomb Conspiracy case and kept in jail for over a year. It was during this enforced solitude that the spiritual trend in his psyche gained predominance, and though after his acquittal he continued for some time with political activities, he realized that his real life-work lay elsewhere. In 1910 on a sudden inner impulse, he left Bengal for the French possession of Chandernagore and from there moved on to the other French possession of Pondicherry where he lived for forty years until his death in 1950. In the course of his four decades at Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo developed one of the most comprehensive and original systems of thought in modern times. He based himself upon the Hindu tradition, but gave creative interpretations to the ancient texts including the Vedas and the Upanishads. His masterly *Essays on the Gita* is perhaps the most outstanding of the many commentaries that have been written upon this sacred text since Shankaracharya, while his *magnum opus, The Life Divine,* his massive epic poem *Savitri* and numerous other works stand as a testimony to his gigantic intellect and deep intuition.

If his political philosophy can be called spiritual nationalism, Sri Aurobindo's general philosophy can well be called spiritual evolution. He rejected the traditional Hindu concept of individual salvation, and stressed those aspects of the Hindu tradition that speak of raising the collective consciousness of the race. The key concept in his thought was that of spiritual evolution. According to Sri Aurobindo, Man is the result of aeons of evolution from unicellular organisms up through mineral, vegetable and

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animal forms. However, he is by no means the end-product of evolution. Sri Aurobindo postulates a further evolutionary thrust, from man with his mental faculties to superman with supramental faculties. Indeed he held that it is only with the next quantum leap in the evolutionary adventure that mankind could break out of its present impasse and fulfil its spiritual destiny.

Sri Aurobindo wrote at great length with regard to this leap, and presented for its fulfilment his own path which he called Integral Yoga because it seeks to draw together the strands of the four traditional yogas into a single, multi-faceted spiritual endeavour. Sri Aurobindo's goal was not individual salvation, not even racial salvation, but nothing less than a fundamental change in the texture of terrestrial consciousness itself, the creation of 'a new heaven and a new earth'. Often described as the pioneer of the supramental, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, worked out with the active collaboration of his companion Madame Alfassa, known as the Mother, has three broad movements — first, a complete and integral surrender to the divine, second, a raising of the human consciousness to the supramental level, and third, a return to earth after absorbing the power and light of the supramental so that its influence can be directly brought to bear upon terrestrial life. This stress on evolution, though based essentially upon the Hindu texts, marks a new development in contemporary Hinduism which still has not fully unfolded itself.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

Mahatma Gandhi is known throughout the world for the unique leadership that he gave to the Indian freedom movement, for the concepts of 'satya' and 'ahimsa', truth and non-violence, which he made the cornerstones of his political philosophy, and for the manner in which, clad only in a loin cloth, he was able to shake the foundations of the great British Empire. Indeed the Indian freedom movement marked the end of the colonial era that had dominated the world scene for the preceding three centuries, and India's independence in 1947 heralded the emergence into freedom of dozens of other nations that had for long been subjected to colonial subjugation. Mahatma Gandhi is today revered in India as the Father of the Nation, and remains a source of inspiration in India and wherever man is still struggling for freedom.

It is useful to remember, however, that Gandhi's approach to politics was deeply grounded on Hindu principles. He was himself a devout Hindu, and will go down in history as one of the greatest social reformers that Hinduism has produced. In a way he combined the two streams of thought — Radical and Moderate — in the freedom movement. While accepting the Radicals' goal of 'Purna Swaraj', complete freedom, he also breathed new life into the reform movements that the moderate leaders had espoused. Gandhi's main contribution to Hinduism was the manner in which he took up the problem of the 'untouchables', whose ill-treatment had been one of the

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most disgraceful features of Hindu society. By renaming them as 'Harijans', or children of God, he made a symbolic gesture of atonement, and thereafter he pursued a policy of living in Harijan colonies wherever he went, personally cleaning latrines and in other ways giving these depressed classes a sense of self-esteem and involvement in the mainstream of Hindu society. The special reservations in legislatures, services and educational institutions are a direct result of Gandhi's influence and also the remarkable contribution by the Harijan leader, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

Another major contribution made by Gandhi was the involvement of women in large numbers in the freedom movement, and the stress he laid upon their social emancipation. His 'constructive programme', which included the propagation of handicrafts and cottage industries, also had an egalitarian effect upon Hindu society. All his prayer meetings began with 'Ramdhun', chanting of the Lord's name, and for his concept of the perfect government he went back to the 'Ram Rajya', the ideal rule in the ancient days of Sri Rama. He wrote a commentary on the Bhagvadgita which he looked upon as a perennial source of inspiration. He encouraged worship of the cow, not so much on religious grounds but as a symbol of the beneficent symbiosis between human and animal existence.

Gandhi's concept of 'Truth' is deeply based on the Hindu tradition. The famous words of the Mundaka Upanishad, 'Satyameva jayate'—'Truth alone triumphs' — constituted his motto, and it was later adopted as India's national motto after independence. His insistence on 'ahimsa', non-violence, also had its roots in one aspect of Hinduism, although this was stressed more in the Buddhist and Jain traditions. His autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* is a remarkable document and shows Gandhi's deep commitment to the fundamental ideals of Hinduism. While he never claimed to be a religious leader, and always displayed the utmost humility in such matters, he was categorical in his assertion that for him religion had primacy over all other aspects, and that it was absurd to hold that politics had nothing to do with religion. He stressed the Hindu concept of the essential unity and harmony of all religions, and his prayer meetings would have readings from the other religious scriptures in addition to those from Hinduism. He was greatly influenced by the saint-singers of medieval India, specially Kabir and Mirabai, and shared their direct and simple approach to religion for the masses.

During his three decades of political pre-eminence in India, Gandhi's contribution to the regeneration of Hinduism and the reform of Hindu society was monumental. He must, therefore, be ranked not only as a unique political leader but also as one of the main formative influences in modern Hinduism, a man who has left an indelible impress of his personality not only upon his country but upon his religion as well.

In addition to these five outstanding personalities of modern Hinduism, numerous other major figures on the contemporary Hindu scene have made their contribution to the regeneration and re-interpretation of Hinduism in

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our own century. Most of them have founded their own societies and religious organisations. These include such persons as Yogananda Paramhansa who preached in America and founded the Yogoda Society; Swami Nikhilananda and Swami Prabhavananda of the Ramakrishna Mission in the USA; Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, who founded the Divine Life Society; Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, whose Krishna Consciousness movement has made such a mark in the West, and Sri Krishna Prem, an Englishman who has written glowing commentaries on the Bhagvadgita and the Kathopanishad and who, along with his guru Yashoda Ma, founded a Krishna temple near Almora in the Himalayas.

Among those still active at the time of writing are the saintly Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha in south India; the blind Swami Gangeshwarananda, who has done such remarkable work in the interpretation and popularization of the Vedas and is still alert at the age of 100; Maharishi Mahesh Yogi with his transcendental meditation; Swami Ranganathananda and other saints of the Ramakrishna Mission; Swami Chinmayananda, who has founded his own mission for the regeneration of Hinduism; the brilliant but controversial Acharya Rajneesh; Sai Baba of the miraculous materializations and Sri Madhava Ashish, who carries on the tradition of his guru, Sri Krishna Prem, at Mirtola. A special word may be said about J. Krishnamurti who, though he may not accept the description, is deeply rooted in the great tradition of Hindu teachers, and Pandit Gopi Krishna, who has written remarkable books on the Kundalini. In addition, of course, there are numerous heads of the traditional monastic orders including those established in the country by Shankaracharya.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but is enough to show that Hinduism is in one of its important phases of creative resurgence. The rise of science and technology, on the one hand, and of communism with its atheistic implications, on the other, is a profound challenge to established religions throughout the world. To survive, a mere reiteration of old orthodoxies is not enough. What is required is a re-interpretation of ancient truths in the light of contemporary compulsions, and this Hinduism has done time and again in its long and eventful history.

THE FUTURE

Man today stands at a crucial crossroad in his long and tortuous evolution on this planet. Science and technology, if wisely used, have given him for the first time the capacity to abolish deprivation and poverty, illiteracy and disease, unemployment and inequality from the face of the earth. On the other hand, the same science has also given him the power to destroy not only the human race but perhaps all life on this planet. The old is dying and the new is struggling to be born, and man finds himself precariously poised between the past and the future. There is a great churning of the collective consciousness of humanity, and a tremendous urge for new certitudes to take the place of the old bulwarks that are collapsing. In

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such a situation, all religions face a fundamental challenge. Hinduism, with its tremendous capacity for regeneration and reinterpretation, should not have anything to fear. Indeed India, with its rich and varied religious heritage, as well as the most distinguished pool of scientific talent in the developing world, should be able to give the right lead to humanity at this crucial juncture.

The contribution of Hinduism in the past to world civilization has been many-faceted. It covers, to mention just a few fields, mathematics (the discovery of zero or 'shunya' which was the pre-requisite for any advance in this highly abstract science); medicine (through Ayurveda, one of the most ancient and integrated systems of medicine known to man); architecture (which produced such wonders as the rock-cut caves of Ellora and the great temple cities of south India); dance (with the Bharata Natyam and other classical dance-forms based upon Bharata's great treatise the *Natya Shastra*); music (both in the Karnataka tradition and the Hindustani mode which has had such an impact in recent years upon the West); psychology (through Yoga, which represents the most profound enquiry into the mysteries of the human mind and psyche yet developed by man); linguistics and literature (through the vehicle of Sanskrit, unparalleled in its power and majesty, and other great languages including Tamil); and, of course, philosophy (from the luminous utterances of the Upanishads down the corridors of time to Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo in this century). In these and other fields too numerous to catalogue, the Hindu mind has contributed to the corpus of human knowledge and attainment in a manner of which few religions can boast.

Hinduism retains an inner dynamism and presents certain key concepts that are particularly relevant in this nuclear age, not only for Hindus but also for the entire human race. The five seminal ideas that follow have been chosen for their width of outlook that transcends religious and denominational barriers, and gives them universal relevance.

The Unity of Mankind

Every country has developed a love for its own nationhood, but there are few that have had the capacity to rise above the imposing mansion of nationalism and conceptualize the unity of the entire human race. It has been the Hindu genius that although it has accepted and reiterated nationalism in the modern sense, particularly after the great renaissance in the nineteenth century, its best minds have always held up the concept of mankind as a single family, 'Vasudhaiva kutumbakam', as the Rig Veda has it. The relevance of this to the present human predicament is obvious. Science and technology have now converted what was once only a vision in the minds of seers into a concrete reality. Time and space are shrinking before our eyes, and the extraordinary photograph of earth taken from the moon shows our planet as it really is, a tiny spaceship hurtling through the endless vastnesses of space, so beautiful and yet so fragile. The

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essential unity of the race that inhabits this planet, based upon the fact of 'humanness' itself, is thus a concept that is growing increasingly relevant as this century draws to its close and mankind struggles desperately to survive its own technological ingenuity.

The Harmony of Religions

The second great concept that Hinduism has developed through the ages is that of the harmony of religions. The yearning of the human for the Divine, which is at the heart of the religious quest, has in practice often been translated into hideous strife between the followers of different religions, each convinced of its own righteousness, and of cruel persecution within various religions themselves. The Hindu ethos, however, has always accepted different paths to the Divine — *'Ekam sadvipra bahuda vadanti'*, as the Rig Veda has it, 'Truth is one, the wise call it by many names.' Apart from Hinduism, which has always been the predominant religion of India, there are millions of Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians (of several denominations) and Jews who have lived peacefully in the country for centuries. There are also famous shrines and pilgrimage-centres sacred to all these religions.

The unique synthesis achieved in Kashmir between the Shaiva tradition and the Sufi influx, resulting in the Rishi cult equally sacred to Hindus and Muslims, is only one of the more dramatic manifestations of the Hindu tradition of religious harmony. Tolerating another religion is at best a negative approach, but accepting all religions positively and gladly is a peculiarly Hindu contribution: Its message of the harmony of religions, of the essential unity of mystical experiences, of accepting the Divine as so opulent and all-embracing that any effort to move towards it is to be welcomed regardless of its style or idiom, is thus extremely relevant in the modern age.

The Divinity of the Individual

Flowing from the concept of the unity of mankind and the harmony of religions is the third aspect of the Hindu message which reiterates the divinity and dignity of the individual. It is true that Hindu society often appears to be so highly hierarchical and stratified, and places so much emphasis upon social duty and status, that individual freedom seems to be at a discount. However, it must be remembered that parallel to and, ultimately, overriding these social stratifications runs the basic concept of the divinity of the human individual. Every person born into the human race, regardless of sex or religion, colour or caste, language or geographical location, partakes of the essential mystery of divine potential. Every Atman, in the Hindu view, contains the seeds of spiritual growth and ultimate realization.

Howsoever diverse the circumstances, howsoever hostile the environment, Hinduism believes that there is within the human psyche the unquenchable spark of divinity that can, sooner or later, be fanned into the blazing fire of spiritual realization. This concept endows every individual

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with a dignity that immediately places him, in essence, above and beyond social customs and traditions. Today, when human dignity is at a discount with various collectivities imposing their domination over the individual in a hundred different ways, this aspect of Hinduism's message is of no mean significance. It provides the counterpoint to the concept of human unity, reasserting the unique significance of each individual while stressing the unity of the entire race.

The Quality of Creative Synthesis

The fourth facet of the Hindu ethos flows from its unusual synthesising and syncretizing capacity. Against the rigid dichotomy between action in the world and withdrawn meditation, it places the great ideal of the Gita, wherein the way of works and the way of knowledge are fused in the crucible of dedication to the divine; against the cruel dichotomy between matter and energy (which has only recently been breached in the West by Einstein and his successors), the Indian mind has postulated the essential oneness behind all existence — 'Ishavasyamidam sarvam yatkinchya jagatyamjagat', as the Isha Upanishad has it, the same energy pulsating in the heart of the atom as in the depths of the farthest galaxy; against the dogmatic confrontation between science and religion, there is the vision of both these great disciplines as two different approaches towards essentially the same truth, one reaching outwards into the very structure of the cosmos and the other inwards into the very essence of the human psyche. This capacity to balance, to harmonise disparate concepts and apparently contradictory movements, has been the hallmark of the greatest Hindu minds, and carries within it the ideological seeds of a world civilization in the future which, ideally, would weld together the best traditions of national cultures into a glowing and harmonious synthesis.

Cosmic Values

Finally, in the context of our newly achieved capacity to break away from the confines of this planet and begin a tentative advance into the vastnesses of outer space, Hinduism has provided a scheme of cosmic values which are startling in their contemporary relevance. The concept of vast aeons of time through which the world passes (four ages or *Yugas* totalling 4.32 billion years, each adding up to only a single day of Brahma!) more closely approximates to the age of this earth than any other scheme of classical calculation. The concept of millions upon millions of galaxies, 'koti koti brahmanda', once considered to be merely an absurd flight of fancy, is now beginning to come alive as the boundless universe unfolds itself before our startled gaze. The vision of the cosmic dance of Shiva, where millions of galaxies spring into being every moment and millions are extinguished in the unending cycle of eternity, is only now beginning to reflect the knowledge that we are receiving from our initial probings into the universe around us.

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And yet, within all these vastnesses, perhaps because of them, remains the eternal mystery of the human personality. Among billions of galaxies in the universe one is ours; among billions of stars in this galaxy one is ours; among billions of human beings in this solar system one of them is ourselves, but such is the grandeur and mystery of the Atman that it can move towards a comprehension of the unutterable mystery of existence. We, who are children of the past and the future, of earth and heaven, of light and darkness, of the human and the divine, at once evanescent and eternal, of the world and beyond it, within time and in eternity, yet have the capacity to comprehend our condition, to rise above our terrestrial limitations and, finally, to transcend the throbbing abyss of space and time itself. This, in essence, is the message of Hinduism.

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The Scriptures

All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man's possession.

Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years. Thus it is in thee and not otherwise than this; action cleaves not to a man.

Sunless are those worlds and enveloped in blind gloom whereto all they in their passing hence resort who are slayers of their souls.

One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, That the Gods reach not, for It progresses ever in front. That, standing, passes beyond others as they run. In That the Master of Life establishes the Waters.

That moves and That moves not; That is far and the same is near; That is within all this and That also is outside all this.

But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self shrinks not thereafter from aught.

He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?

It is He that has gone abroad—That which is bright, bodiless, without scar of imperfection, without sinews, pure, unpierced by evil. The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere the Self-existent has ordered objects perfectly according to their nature from years sempiternal.

Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.

Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Knowledge, other that which comes by the Ignorance; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.

He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality.

Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Non-Birth, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Birth alone.

Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Birth, other that which comes by the Non-Birth; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.

He who knows that as both in one, the Birth and the dissolution of Birth, by the dissolution crosses beyond death and by the Birth enjoys Immortality.

The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight.

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O Fosterer, O Sole Seer, O Ordainer, O illumining Sun, O power of the Father of creatures, marshal thy rays, draw together thy light; the lustre which is thy most blessed form of all, that in Thee I behold. The Purusha there and there, He am I.

The Breath of things is an immortal Life, but of this body ashes are the end. OM. O Will, remember, that which was done remember. O Will, remember that which was done, remember.

O god Agni, knowing all things that are manifested, lead us by the good path to the felicity; remove from us the devious attraction of sin. To thee completest speech of submission we would dispose.

Isha Upanishad Shrutis 1-18

The Three Purushas

The Blessed Lord:

With its root above, its branches below, the Ashwattha is said to be imperishable; the leaves of it are the hymns (of the Veda), and he who knows it is the Veda-knower.

The branches of this tree, growing by the gunas, extend both below and above; the sense-objects are its foliage; down here into the world of men stretch its roots which bind them to karma.

Its form is not so perceived here, nor its beginning, nor end nor its foundation. Having cut down this firm-rooted Ashwattha by the strong sword of detachment, one should seek for that status whence there is no return,—"I take refuge in that original Being alone from whom proceeds the sempiternal urge to action."

Those who, free from pride and delusion, have conquered the fault of attachment, and who, with all desires stilled, liberated from the dualities like joy and grief, are always in the Spirit, they, the wise ones, proceed towards the eternal status.

There the sun does not illumine, nor the moon, nor fire; having gone thither, they return not; that is the highest status of My being.

It is an eternal portion of Me that becomes the Jiva in the world of Jivas and works upon the five senses as well as mind, the sixth one, which are there in Prakriti.

When the Lord takes up a body and when he abandons it, he goes forth taking these (the senses and the mind) with him, as does the wind take the perfumes from their seat.

Standing over the ear, the eye, the touch, the taste and the smell, and also the mind, he enjoys the sense-objects.

The deluded do not perceive him in his going forth or in his staying or in his enjoying or in his assumption of gunas; they who have the eye of knowledge perceive.

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The Yogins who strive see the Lord lodged in themselves; but the ignorant, not formed in the spiritual mould, even if they strive to do so, see Him not.

The light that comes from the sun and illumines the whole world, that which is in the moon and in fire, know that light to be Mine.

I enter into the earth and sustain the beings by My might; I become the Soma full of living sap and nourish all the plants.

I become the flame of life and enter into the body of living beings and, united with Prana and Apana, digest the four kinds of food.

I am lodged in the heart of all; from Me are memory and knowledge and also their withdrawal. Verily, that which is to be known by all the Vedas am I, the knower of Vedas am I and also the author of Vedanta.

There are two Purushas in this world, Kshara and Akshara (mutable and immutable); the Kshara is all these existences, and the Kutastha (the stable and high-seated) is called Akshara.

There is another, the Uttama Purusha, the highest Being, called the supreme Self; he, the imperishable Lord, enters the three worlds and upbears them.

As I am beyond the mutable, greater and higher even than the immutable, therefore in the world and in the Veda, I am proclaimed as Purushottama, the supreme Purusha.

He who, free from delusion, thus knows Me as the Purushottama, he, the all-knowing, adores Me with his entire being, O Bharata.

O sinless one, thus is this most secret Shastra spoken by Me. He who knows it becomes the man of wisdom and fulfilment, O Bharata.

The Gita Chapter 15

Festivals

With its tremendous diversity, Hinduism is replete with numerous festivals, seasonal or dedicated to certain deities or *avataras*. These vary from region to region, and if one were to make a comprehensive list of them all, they would probably cover almost every day of the year. However, there are some festivals that have over the centuries become generally accepted throughout India, and indeed wherever Hindus live. Below is a list of the more important ones. As the dates vary due to the Indian calendar, only the months in which these festivals usually occur have been indicated.

Makara Sankranti/Pongal/Lohri (January): This is a major harvest festival, and in the southern states it is a big event when cattle are gaily decorated and fed on 'Pongal', a sweet preparation of rice, as a symbolic gesture of veneration. In the eastern region millions take a holy dip in the Ganga. The night before Makara Sankranti is celebrated as Lohri in north India when bonfires are lit and Agni, God of Fire, is worshipped. This marks the height of winter.

Vasanta Panchami (February): This heralds the advent of spring. Yellow is particularly worn as a symbolic sign of veneration to Saraswati, Goddess of Learning, Wisdom and Fine Arts. Often small children are introduced to their first day of education on this occasion.

Mahashivaratri (March): This is observed by Hindus everywhere in honour of the great Lord, Shiva Mahadeva.

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Holi (March): This festival of colour is the most boisterous of India's festivals. Men, women and children throw coloured water and powder on one another, and exchange greetings and sweets.

Ramanavami (April): The birthday of Sri Rama, celebrated by Hindus everywhere.

Vaishakhi (April): The first day of the 'Vikrami' calendar, which is about 50 years older than the Christian era. It is observed in several regions as New Year's Day, especially in north India.

Naga Panchami (August): This is celebrated in north and western India as a day of worship of the Snake-God, Shesha (the infinite), on whom Lord Vishnu reclines. Evidently a pre-Aryan festival that has been absorbed in the Hindu pantheon.

Raksha Bandhan (August): A special full-moon day when sisters tie the protective thread around their brothers' wrists, while sweets and greetings are exchanged among family members and friends. It is often linked with the thread that Draupadi tied around Sri Krishna's wrist in the story of the *Mahabharata.*

Janmashtami (August): The birth anniversary of Sri Krishna, celebrated by Hindus everywhere. There are special celebrations in Mathura and Vrindavan which have close associations with Sri Krishna's childhood.

Ganesh Chaturthi/Vinayaka Chaturthi (September): This is dedicated to Ganesh, the elephant-headed God of Wisdom and Prosperity.

Onam (September): The harvest festival of Kerala. Believed in mythology to be connected with the return, once a year, of the Titan King Bali, who was sent to the underworld by one of Vishnu's incarnations, Vamana.

Durga Puja (October): This festival is dedicated to the great Goddess Durga, her fierce battle and ultimate victory over the buffalo-demon, Mahishasura. Particularly observed in Bengal, where beautiful images of Durga are worshipped, carried in procession and finally immersed in the Ganga after four days of worship.

Vijaya Dashami or Dussehra (October): The Durga Puja culminates in Vijaya Dashami, the great symbol of the triumph of good over evil. Based on the epic story of the *Ramayana*, the Ramalila is enacted for 10 days preceding Vijaya Dashami, culminating on the festival day in the burning of the effigies of Ravana, the demon-king of Sri Lanka, his brother Kumbhakarna and his son Indrajit. Millions all over India watch the burning of these effigies.

Deepavali/Lakshmi Puja (October or November): The Hindu festival of lights, when every city, town, village is turned into a fairyland with millions of electric lights, candles and oil lamps illuminating public and private buildings. For the trading community it marks the beginning of the New Year. Deepavali or Diwali is specially dedicated to the worship of Mahalakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity and Wealth.

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नमो अरिहंताणं ।
नमो सिद्धाणं ।
नमो आयरियाणं ।
नमो उवज्झायाणं ।
नमो लोए सव्वसाहूणं ।
एसो पंच नमुक्कारो सव्वपावप्पणासणो ।
मंगलाणं च सव्वेसिं पढमं हवइ मंगलं ॥

Homage to the Arhats.
Homage to the Siddhas.
Homage to the Acharyas.
Homage to the Upadhyayas.
Homage to all the monks.
This homage to the Five Dignitaries destroys all sins.
It is the best and the foremost of all auspicious things.

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Jainism

Jainism, like Hinduism and Buddhism, is one of the three great indigenous religions of India. And while the other two spread beyond the frontiers of India, Jainism has remained a peculiarly Indian religion. There are an estimated four million Jains in India today, most of whom belong to the mercantile community.

Jainism does not postulate a leader and its followers worship no deity. The followers of Jainism follow the teaching of 24 Tirthankaras or saints. The last and most significant Tirthankara was Mahavira.

The term Jain is derived from *Jina,* or one who conquers enemies like attachment, passion, jealousy and so on. In olden times, a great saint or liberated soul was known as a Jina or a Buddha.

Modern Jain scholars prefer to call Jainism, along with Buddhism, . . . a *Shramanika* religion or belonging to the *Shramana* ascetic tradition, as opposed to the Vedic, Brahmanic or Hindu tradition.

THE TIRTHANKARAS

Tirthankara is a term which for a long time has generally been reserved exclusively for Founders of the Jain doctrine who organised the fourfold Jain *Sangha,* Church, made up of the *sadhus,* monks, the *sadhvis,* nuns, the *shravaks,* Jain laymen and the *shravikas,* Jain laywomen. *Tirtha* is the Jain Sangha and a Tirthankara is one who establishes or organises the Jain Church. Jain writers offer another explanation of the term Tirthankaras, builders of the *tirtha,* ford, which leads one across the ocean of suffering.

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The Jains believe that twenty-four Tirthankaras appear in each half of a time-cycle and have done so from beginningless time and will continue to do so. The two halves, *aras,* of every time-circle are known as *utsarpini,* ascending order showing man's gradual progress and *avasarpini,* descending order showing man's gradual regress. The Jain doctrine is therefore eternal and Tirthankaras only re-establish it from time to time. Of the twenty-four Tirthankaras who flourished in the present avasarpini Rishabha or Adinatha, of very remote past, was the first, the twenty-second was Neminatha or Arishtanemi, who in Jain mythology is associated with Krishna as a cousin and who obtained *nirvana* on Mt. Girnar in Saurashtra, Gujarat. Lives of twenty-two Tirthankaras, from Rishabha to Neminatha, belong more to the domain of mythology than to that of history. But the twenty-third Tirthankara Parshva is accepted by modern researchers as a historical person who lived in the eighth century B.C. about 250 years before the death of the last Tirthankara, Varddhamana Mahavira in 527 B.C.

The names of the twenty-four Tirthankaras of this age are: (1) Rishabha (2) Ajita (3) Sambhava (4) Abhinandana (5) Sumati (6) Padmaprabha (7) Suparshva (8) Chandraprabha (9) Pushpadanta or Suvidhi (10) Shitala (11) Shreyamsa (12) Vasupujya (13) Vimala (14) Ananta (15) Dharma (16) Shanti (17) Kunthu (18) Ara (19) Mali (20) Munisuvrata (21) Nami (22) Nemi or Arishtanemi (23) Parshva and (24) Varddhamana Mahavira.

Parshva was the son of Ashvasena, king of Varanasi, by his queen Vama. After living as a householder till the age of thirty, he retired and performed severe austerities as an ascetic. During these penances, he was molested by a non-Jain ascetic called Kamatha and protected and sheltered by a Naga, Dharanendra. This incident, mixed with supernatural elements in the life of Parshva, has been a very popular theme in Jain art, sculpture and painting, especially amongst the Digambaras. Several sculptured reliefs are found in the south, at Ellora, Aihole, Badami, Kalugumalai, etc., and even loose sculptures are also found from Jain sites in North and South India.

In the *Uttaradhyayanasutra,* a Jain canonical tet, is reported an important dialogue between Keshin, a monk of the order of Parshva, and Gautama, the first disciple of Mahavira. The two leaders perhaps met with the special purpose of removing misunderstanding between the followers of Parshva and those of Mahavira. They consider the difference regarding the use of clothing and arrive at a compromise, concluding that external signs are of little consequence and function merely to help identify various groups engaged in various practices. Mahavira and his monk-disciples moved about without any clothing, so did the followers of Rishabha, according to an old verse occurring in Jain canonical literature. According to this verse, the followers of the remaining Tirthankaras had the option to remain nude or wear clothes. Parshva's followers like Keshin who were fully clad and Mahavira's followers who believed in

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nudity for Jain monks thus conceded that this difference was superficial and did not materially affect the doctrine.

The sixth century B.C. was a period of great intellectual activity not only in India but also in other parts of the world like Greece, Persia and China. In India, by the time of Mahavira, class or caste distinctions and priestly oligarchy with its sacrificial complexity of rituals and extravagant killing of animals became a means of popular exploitation and a source of social irritation. As a revolt against it, a process of bold philosophical and ethical thinking, irrespective of scriptural word, started. Besides the Vedic Aryans, there was a large mass of population with different cultures, beliefs, superstitions, traditions and conceptions about gods and goddesses. As the Aryans came in contact with them, a certain racial and cultural fusion was unavoidable. This led to a certain breadth of outlook and liberty of thought. The Kshatriya or the warrior class challenged the supremacy of the Brahmin class and since the latter played a dominant role in the sacrifices, the sacrificial ritual, along with the killing involved in it, they became the target of attack by the Kshatriyas, of whom two princes, Mahavira and Gautama Buddha, succeeded in organising their own religious sects with their own theology, philosophy, rules of conduct and worship.

MAHAVIRA

Mahavira was born in the northern suburb of Vaishali, modern Basarh, called the Kshatriyakundagrama, the Basukunda of today in Magadha. Mahavira's father, Siddhartha, belonged to the Naya (Natika of Pali texts and Jnatri in Sanskrit) clan, of Kashyapa gotra, while his mother is said to have been Trishala or Priyakarini, a Vasishthi. The Shvetambaras believe that Mahavira was first conceived in the womb of a Brahmin lady Devananda but the foetus was later transferred to the womb of a Kshatriya lady, Trishala, by Harinegameshin, the commander of God Indra, since Indra realised that no Tirthankaras were born of Brahmin parents. The legend seems to be of a later growth. In the Shvetambara canonical text *Bhagavati,* we find Mahavira respecting Devananda as his mother though no more details in this matter are available in the Jain *Acharangasutra* which contains older information about Mahavira's life.

According to the Digambara sect of the Jains, Varddhamana Mahavira remained a celibate throughout his life, while according to the Shvetambaras, he married Yashoda and had a daughter called Priyadashana. The daughter was married to one Jamali, who later led the first schism in the Jain Church. At the age of thirty, Mahavira renounced worldly life and became a monk. For over a year he used one garment only but later he went about naked, kept no possessions, not even a bowl for food or for drinking water and performed rigorous austerities. He allowed insects to crawl on his body and even bite him. People often shouted at him and hit him because of his uncouth appearance. He meditated day and night

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and lived in various places — workshops, cremation and burial grounds, and under trees. Trying to avoid all sinful activities, he especially avoided injury to any kind of life, thus developing the doctrine of *ahimsa,* non-violence. During his many wanderings, he endured abusive language and physical injuries, always with patience and equanimity. His teachings lay special stress on *samatva* or equanimity. After twelve years of such austerities which included many long fasting periods, Varddhamana Mahavira obtained *Kevalajnana,* the highest knowledge. Braving and wandering about during monsoons, in different towns and villages and preaching for thirty years, Mahavira obtained final nirvana at Pava in northern Bihar, at the age of 72 in 527 B.C. The Jain *Kalpasutra* says that on the night on which the venerable ascetic Mahavira died, eighteen confederate kings of Kashi and Koshala, the nine Mallakis and the nine Lichchhavis instituted an illumination. This night is still celebrated as Dipavali festival by Jains.

CANONICAL LITERATURE

The canonical literature of the Jains, known variously as *ganipidaga,* basket of the Ganadharas, *shruta-jnana,* scriptural knowledge, or merely as the *siddhanta,* doctrine or *agama,* consists of 12 *Angas,* 12 *Upangas,* 10 *Painnas (Prakirnas),* 6 *Chedasutras,* 4 *Mulasutras* and 2 *Chulikasutras, Nandisutra* and *Anuyogadvarasutra.* It is said that there were 14 Purvas, texts which were earlier, possibly of the age of Parshva, knowledge of which was gradually lost after Mahavira and some of his successors. The twelfth Anga text, *Drishtivada,* which included a knowledge of the Purvas, is also lost. The traditional number of the Siddhanta texts is forty-five but lists range from forty-five to fifty and even go up to eighty. Of the Anga texts, the first *Shrutaskandha* each of the *Acharanga* and the *Sutrakritanga* preserve some of the oldest of the Jain canonical works, as shown by modern scholars. So also portions of the *Uttaradhyayana,* included amongst the Mulasutras, the Anga text *Bhagavatisutra,* etc. and a less known work called *Isibhasiain* or *Rishibhashitani,* contain older material. The *Chedasutra* called *Dashashrutaskandha* ends up with *Pajjosavanskappo* or the *Kalpasutra* giving lives of the 24 Thirthankaras with an appendix called *samachari* offering rules for monastic life and a *sthaviravali* or list of eminent monks.

The Jain canonical literature collectively does not belong to one age. The *Prajnapanasutra* is ascribed to Arya Shyama, who is said to have lived 376 or 386 years after Mahavira's nirvana, the *Dashavaikalika* to Arya Shyyambhava, the fourth head of Church after Mahavira, the *Nandisutra* is said to have been composed by Devarddhi gani, head of the second council at Valabhi in the latter part of the fifth century A.D. Bhadrabahu I, who lived 170 years after Mahavira, is credited with the authorship of some metrical commentaries called *Niryuktis* on Agama texts. But references to later schisms, etc., in the *Avashyaka-Niryukti* suggest later interpolations, editing or authorship of another later Bhadrabahu. *Bhashyas* and

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Churnis composed in different periods ranging upto the seventh century A.D., constitute the early commentary literature in the Prakrit language on the Agamas. These texts supply a wealth of information on the culture of the age, though mixed with legendary traditions. During the medieval period, *tikas* and *vrittis* were composed on the Agamas, Haribhadra, Silanka, Abhayadeva and Malayagiri being amongst the most well-known authors of such works.

The Digambaras, while retaining identical names for the Purva and Anga texts, do not believe that any of these have survived in an authentic form. According to them, a few sections dealing with the *Karma* theory, from the third book *Purvagata* of the lost *Drishtivada,* were transmitted by the Digambara monk Dharasena to his disciples Pushpadanta and Bhutabali, who in turn committed the teaching to writing. The resulting work, known as the *Shatkhandagama,* is now published from rare manuscripts. Another work, composed by Gunabhadra and known as *Kashayaprabhrita,* is also regarded as authentic by the Digambara sect. Commentaries on these works, called *Dhavala, Mahadhavala* and *Jayadhavala,* composed in the ninth century A.D. are also published. The Digambaras highly regard texts like the *Mulachara* of Vattakera, the *Bhagavati Aradhana* of Shivakoti and the *Karttikeyanupreksha* of Kartikeya or Kumara. The *Tattvarthadhigamasutra* of Umaswami or Umasvati whose work is claimed by both the Shvetambaras and the Digambaras is said to be the first Jain text composed in Sanskrit in the early centuries of the Christian era dealing with logic, epistemology, ontology, ethics, cosmography, etc.

The Digambara sect values very much the works of Kundakunda Acharya who they think lived in the early centuries of the Christian era and composed works in Prakrit. His *Pravachasara* is a valuable work on Jain ethics, the *Samayasara* on the five entities, the *Niyamasara* on Jain monastic discipline and the six *Prabhritas* on various religious topics. Kundakunda seems to have flourished in *c.* fourth or fifth century A.D.

Non-canonical Shvetambara and Digambara compositions are very extensive and cover a very wide range of subjects: Kavya, Nataka, Katha, Purana, Alankara, Sangita, Tantra, Erotics, Ethics, Yoga, Astronomy, Ayurveda, Stotras, Rasas, etc., composed in Prakrit, Sanskrit, Apabhramsha, Old Rajasthani or Gujarati, Old Kannada, etc. Of these works, the *Vasudevahindi* in Prakrit, composed in *c.* fourth or fifth century, is especially noteworthy as it is the earliest known adaptation of the lost *Brihatkatha* of Gunadhya. Similarly, the *Angavijja* composed about the fourth century A.D. is a great mine of information on the material culture of India of that period.

During the lifetime of Mahavira, Jamali, his son-in-law, according to later literature, led the first schism, *ninhava,* in the Jain Church. Seven more schisms took place during the centuries after the Jina. The last and eighth was led by one Shivabhuti in the year equivalent to 79-80 A.D., ac-

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cording to the Digambaras and the year 82-83 A.D., according to the Shvetambaras. This schism was mainly regarding the use of cloth by the monks. The Digambaras or the 'sky-clad' believed in nudity for the monks, while the Shvetambaras or the 'white-robed ones' allowed the use of garment. As a corollary to this, the Digambaras believed that nirvana was not possible for women since they could not give up all possessions and move about naked. With passage of time, many other smaller points of difference grew up.

SPREAD OF JAINISM

During Mahavira's life-time, Jainism spread mainly in the kingdoms of Videha, Magadha and Anga in the east and as far as Kashi and Koshala in the west. Jainism also seems to have spread to Vidisha, Dashapura and Ujjain and perhaps to Kaushambi, Shravasti, etc. About 170 years after Mahavira, the Jain pontiff Bhadrabahu I seems to have gone to Nepal during a twelve-year famine, while according to the Digambara belief he is supposed to have gone to Shravana Belagola in Karnataka in the south. The belief is not supported by any reliable early evidence and the earliest inscription at Shravana Belagola shows that it was not Bhadrabahu I but a much later Bhadrabahu who predicted the famine and at whose instance the Jain Sangha migrated to the south.

It is just possible that a Jina image was worshipped in Kalinga in the age of a Nanda king, if the reading Kalinga-Jina in Kharavela's inscription at the Hathigumpha cave in Orissa is correct. Kharavela, in the first century B.C. or a little earlier, ruling over Kalinga, was a follower of Jainism.

King Samprati, the grandson of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, is said to have given great patronage to Jainism by facilitating travel in South India, beyond Pratishthanapura in the Deccan, for Jain monks. The earliest known archaeological evidence of Jainism in the south is available in the form of Tamil Brahmi inscriptions on stone, in caves and caverns in different parts of Tamil Nadu.

Beginning with the first or second century B.C., but especially during the Kushana rule, we find great Jain activity at Mathura. Several Jain sculptures and inscriptions of this period have come to light from the excavations of a stupa at Kankali Tila, Mathura. These images of the Tirthankaras, assignable to the Kushana period, either depict the Jina in a standing posture, called *kayotsarga mudra,* and unclothed or, if seated in the crossed-legged posture, *padmasana,* are sculptured in such a way that neither garment nor the genitals are visible. Though the Shvetambara-Digambara differences had already originated in the Kushana period, both the sects worshipped nude images of the Tirthankaras. The earliest known image of Tirthankara with a lower garment, so far discovered, hails from the Jain hoard discovered at Akota near Baroda in Gujarat, Western India, and is assigned to the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. This

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suggests that the Valabhi council under Devarddhi gani marked the final separation of the two sects.

In about the second century B.C., Kalakacharya or Arya Shyama, the black teacher, invited the Shaka tribes to western India and Ujjain, possibly from Shakasthana in Sindh, to overthrow king Garddabhilla, abductor of his sister, a Jain nun. The same Kalakacharya went as far east as Suvarnabhumi in South-east Asia, probably to Burma and later to Annam in Vietnam, where his grand pupil Arya Samudra or Arya Sagara had already gone to preach. Kalaka is credited with having written the *Mulaprathamanuyoga* and abridged canonical texts and composed some work on *Nimittashastra,* science of astrology. He was a very great scholar of the Jain scriptures. It is now proved that he was a historical figure and Jain texts of the sixth century A.D. have referred to his association with some Satavahana ruler.

Arya Vajra, 57 B.C.-57 A.D., was another great monk whose activities extended upto Shurparaka (Sopara), Bombay, on the western coast, and who appears to have supported *chaityavasa* or dwelling by monks in temples, a practice that led to corruption amongst the Jain sects. An inscription at the Son Bhandara cave, Rajgir, Bihar, records that Acharya Vaira (Vajra) excavated two caves suitable for dwellings for monks and in which Jina images were installed for worship. During the Gupta age, *c.* 320-600 A.D. the Jains became stronger in central and western India than in their homeland in Bihar, but they were also patronised by the Gupta rulers of Magadha and Ujjain.

Royal Patronage

In the south, from the fifth century to the twelfth, the Gangas, the Kadambas, the Chalukyas of Badami, the Rashtrakutas and the Hoysalas accorded royal patronage to Jainism. Many Jain poets of great repute flourished under the patronage of the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta. The Rashtrakuta king Amoghavarsha was a pious Jain.

From about the seventh century onwards, Jainism, especially its Shvetambara sect, gained strength in Gujarat and Rajasthan due to royal patronage and the activities of great learned monks like Haribhadra Suri, Udyotana Suri, Vadi Deva Suri, Abhayadeva Suri, Acharya Hemachandra and others. The Shvetambara order of monks was divided into several *gacchas* during the eleventh and later centuries.

In about the sixteenth century, Lonkashaha started a sub-sect known as Sthanakavasi Sampradaya in Western India and claimed that image-worship was not sanctioned in the scriptures. He also denied the authority of certain canonical works referring to image-worship. In the eighteenth century, Acharya Bhikshu organised the Terapantha, a sub-sect of Lonkashah's gaccha. Tulasi gani, the present leader of Terapantha, has organised what is known as Anuvrata Sangha. In the sixteenth century a Digambara

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Taranasvami organised the Taranapantha sect which repudiated image-worship.

Early South Indian rulers are known to have donated land, etc., to the Yapaniya sect, besides giving patronage to the Digambaras and in some cases to the Shvetambaras. The Yapaniya sect is said to have arisen in Vikram Samvat 205 (148 A.D.) and seems to have existed upto the fourteenth century A.D. Yapaniya ascetics remained naked, kept a brush of peacock feathers, ate food from palms of hands and believed in the emancipation of women. Unlike the Digambaras, the Yapaniyas accepted the authenticity of the Shvetambara Agama works.

Gods and Acharyas

Gods are classified into four main groups, *Bhavanavasis, Vyantaras, Jyotishkas* and *Vaimanikas.* They are subdivided into several groups, each group has one Indra as the head with an army of gods, Indra's queens, four guardians of quarters, *lokapalas,* etc. For every class of gods, there are two Indras, in all we get names of 64 Indras — Saudharmendra, Ishanendra, and so on. The Vyantara class of gods is sub-divided into Yakshas, Bhutas, Pishachas, Rakshasas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas, and so on. These lesser deities played an important role in folk worship in ancient India and all sects, Jain, Buddhist and Hindu, had to incorporate and assimilate them in their pantheons and rituals. Mahavira used to stay in Yaksha-shrines and preached to the masses assembled there. Naturally, elements of the ancient Yaksha and Naga cults entered the Jain worship.

Besides these, certain other gods and goddesses like Vijaya, Vaijayanta, Jayanta and Aparajita, the four gate-keepers of the rampart of Jambudvipa, along with goddesses Jaya, Vijaya, Jayanta and Aparajita are very ancient, mentioned also in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya. A list of sixty-four *Dik-kumaris,* who act as nurses when the Tirthankara is born, includes several Vedic goddesses like Ila, Prithvi, Ekanamsha, etc. Six goddesses, Shri, Hri, Dhriti, Kirtti, Buddhi, and Lakshmi, resting in lakes, also show Brahmanical influence or a borrowing from ancient Indian common heritage. However, all such deities are assigned positions subordinate to the *Devadhidevas,* Lord of Lords, who are the Tirthankaras or liberated souls.

Next in order are the Jain ascetic souls called *Acharyas,* leaders of groups of monks, *Upadhyayas,* readers teaching sacred texts, and sadhus, monks, in general. These along with *Arhats* and *Siddhas* are the *Pancha-Parameshthins,* the Five Great Dignitaries, whose worship is the main Jain worship from ancient times.

The 24 Tirthankaras, along with 12 *Chakravartins,* 9 *Vasudevas,* 9 *Baladevas,* constitute a list of 54 *Shalakapurushas* or Mahapurushas to which later are added 9 *Prati-Vasudevas,* enemies of Vasudevas, making a total of 63 Shalakapurushas of the Jain Puranas.

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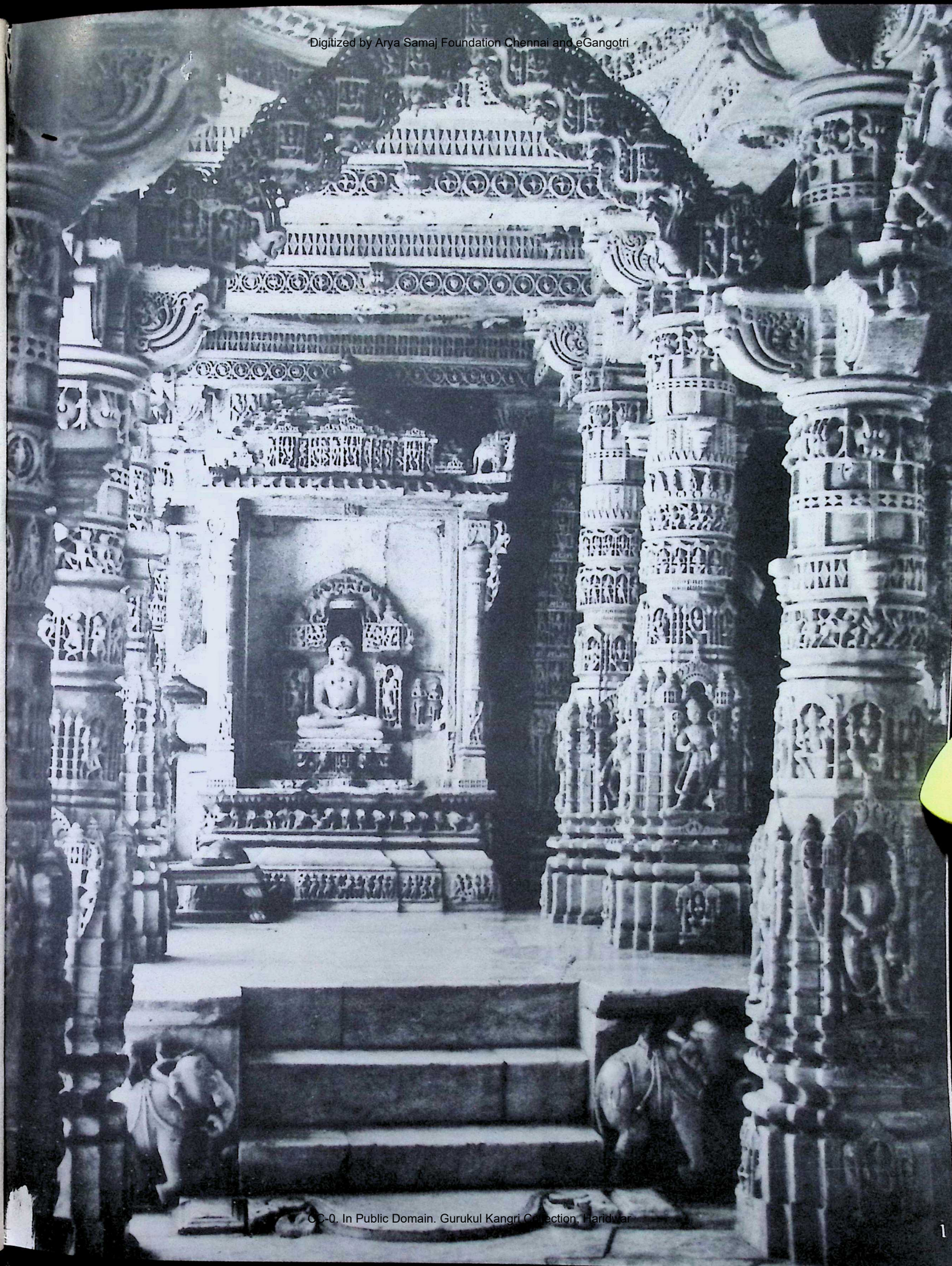

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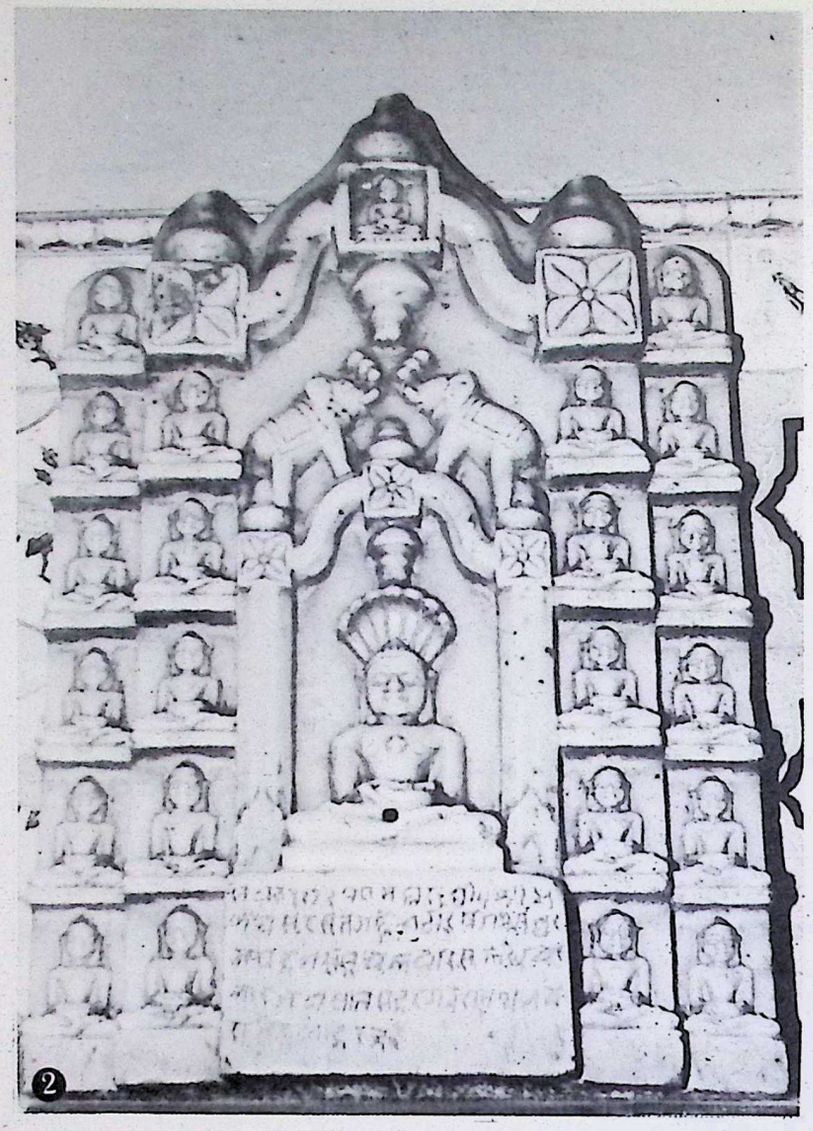

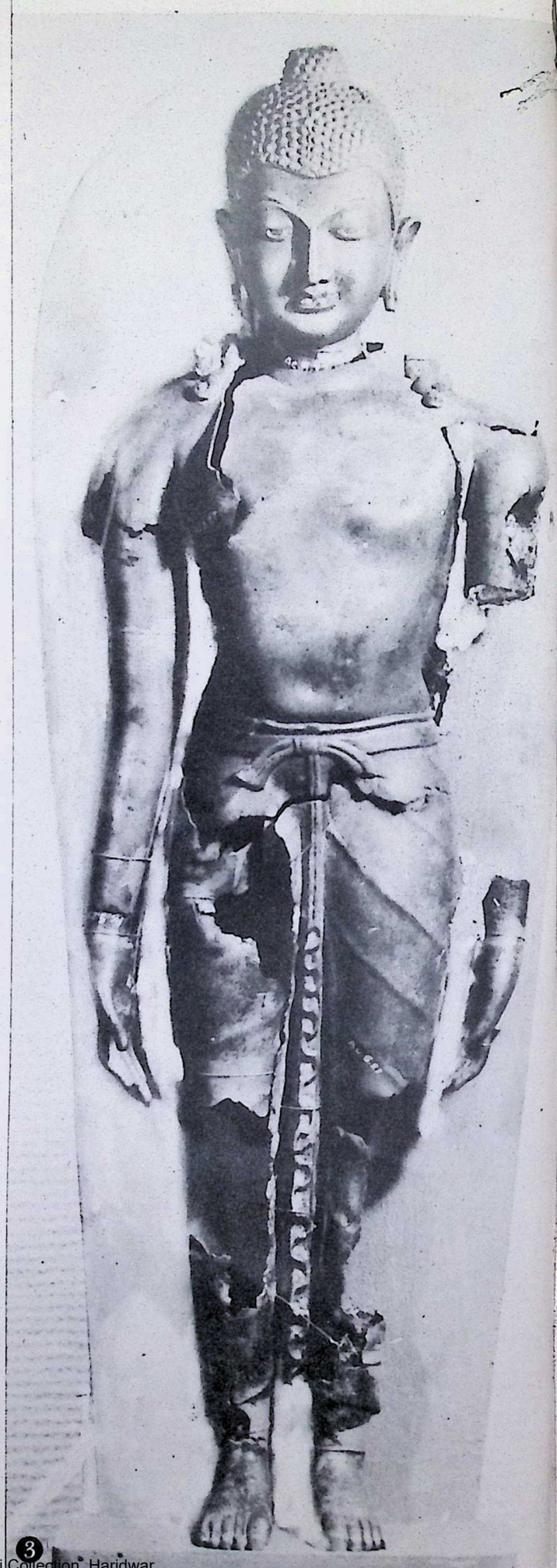

1. "Meditate on the oneness of the self alone, thereby you will attain liberation." *(Sutrakritanga Sutra,* 1.10.12). The richly carved interior of the Vimala Vasahi temple on Mount Abu, Rajasthan. The original temple was erected in the 11th century A.D., but the large mandapa was constructed in the 12th century.

2. The 24 Tirthankaras of Jainism.

3. A bronze figure of Rishbhanatha Adinatha, the first Tirthankara. The bronze dating about 450 A.D. is the earliest known clothed figure of a Tirthankara.

4. The statue of Lord Parshvanath, the 23rd Tirthankara, at the Vimala Vasahi temple on Mount Abu.

5. A crowned bronze figure of Lord Mahavira. According to Jain traditions a portrait statue of Mahavira was fashioned by a demi-god on seeing Mahavira meditating in his palace about a year before his renunciation.

6. An 11th-century bronze image of Lord Mahavira from Singanikkuppam.

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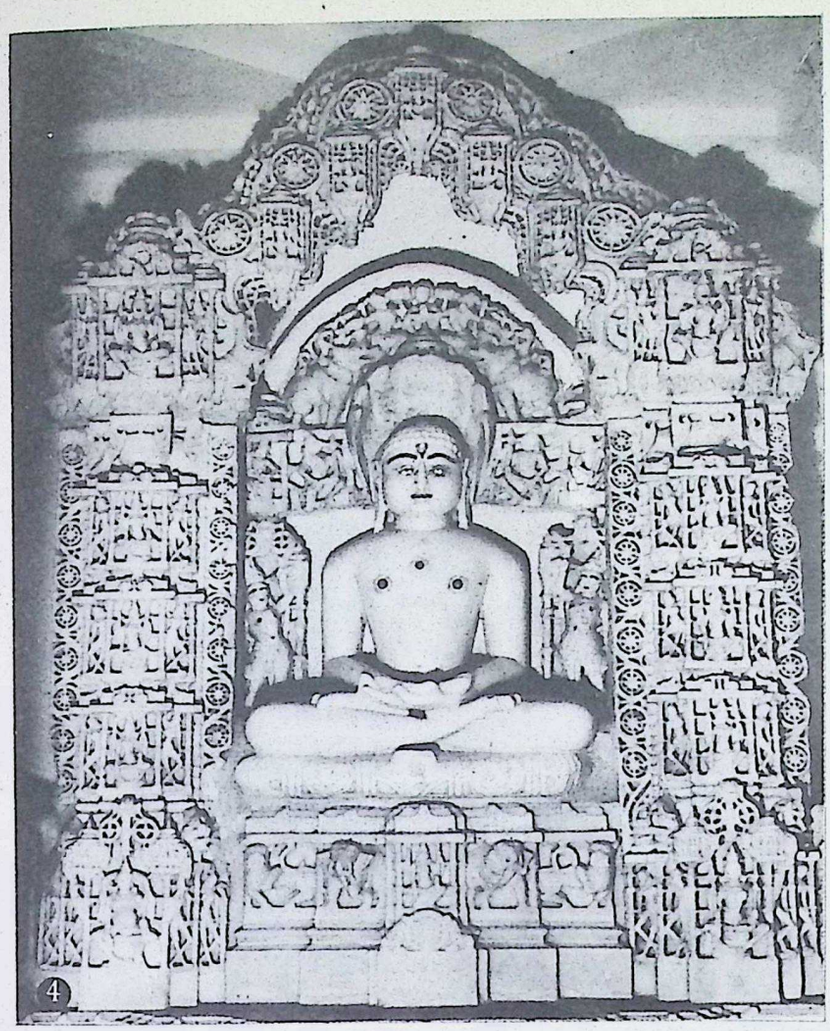

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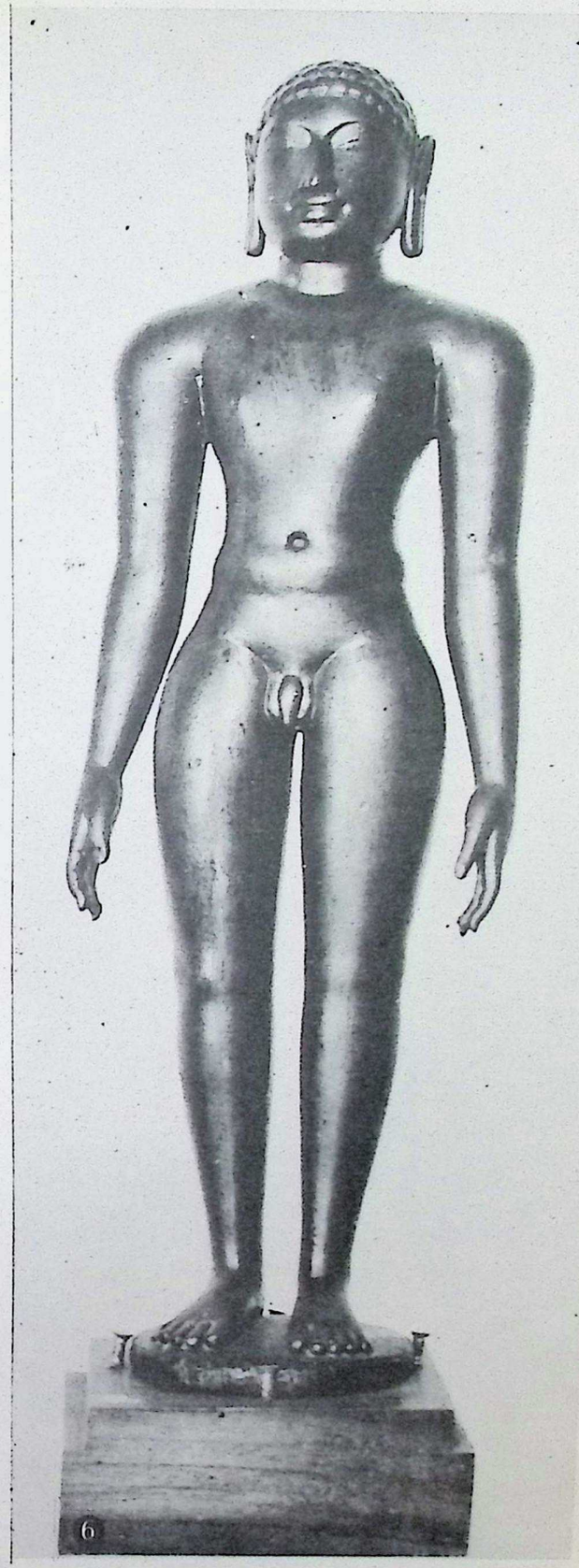

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1. The 7th-century bronze from Akota shows Jain Vidyadevi Acchupta on horseback.

2. A Lokapurusha from Samgrahini Sutra manuscript. The Lokapurusha is a diagram showing the Jain conception of the shape and position of the cosmos comprising three worlds—heaven, earth, hell.

3. The temple city on the Shatrunjaya Hill, Palitana, Gujarat. Most of the temples date back to mediaeval times.

4. A panel sculpture of Jain acharyas and Tirthankaras (standing) from Deogadh.

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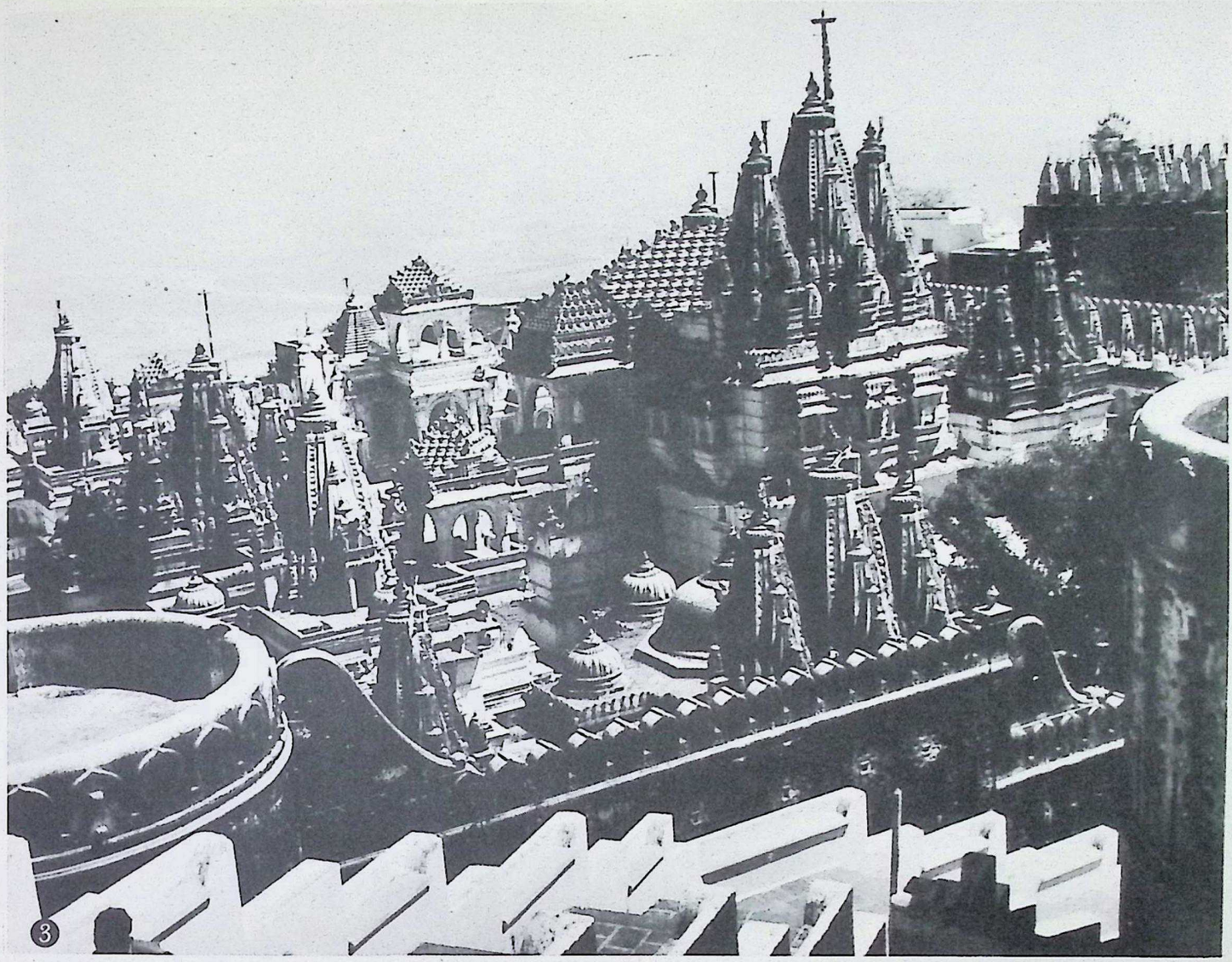

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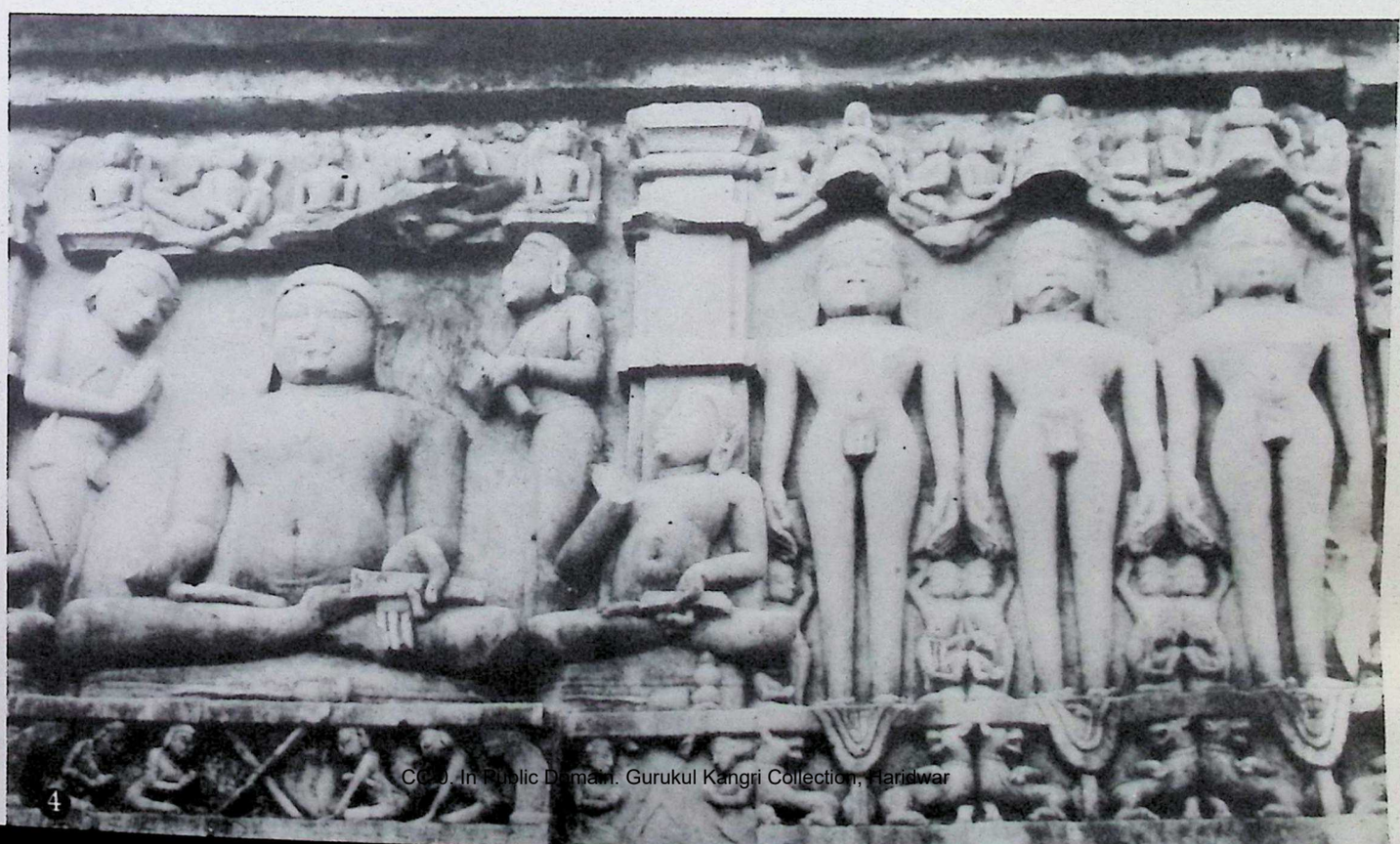

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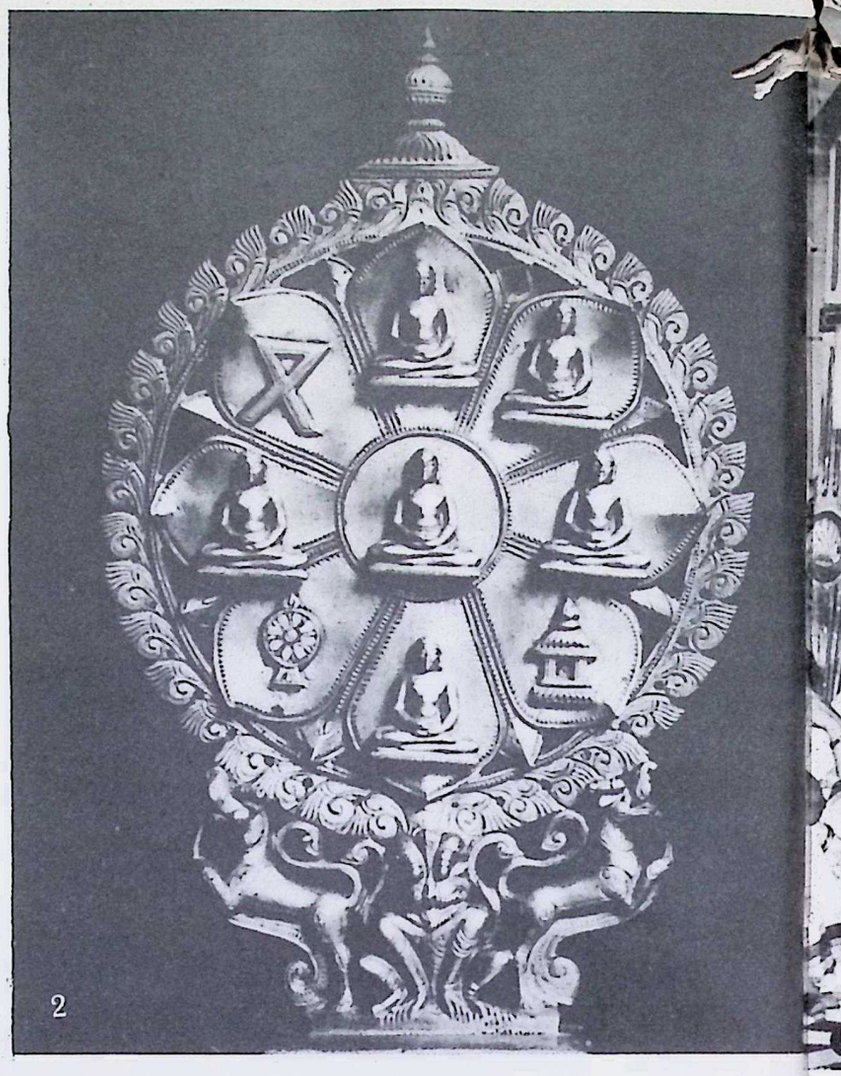
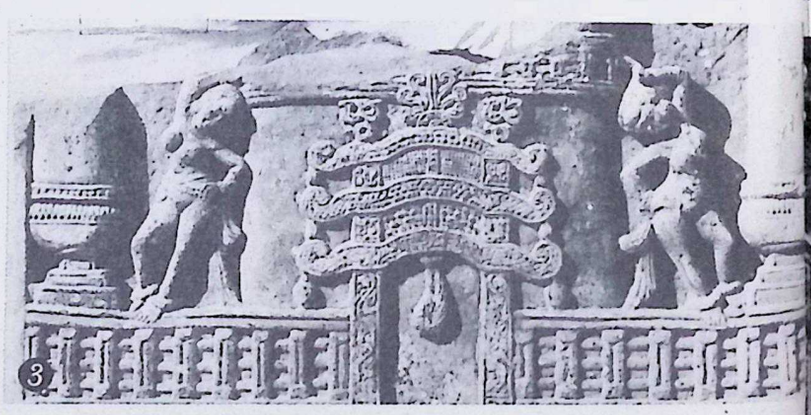


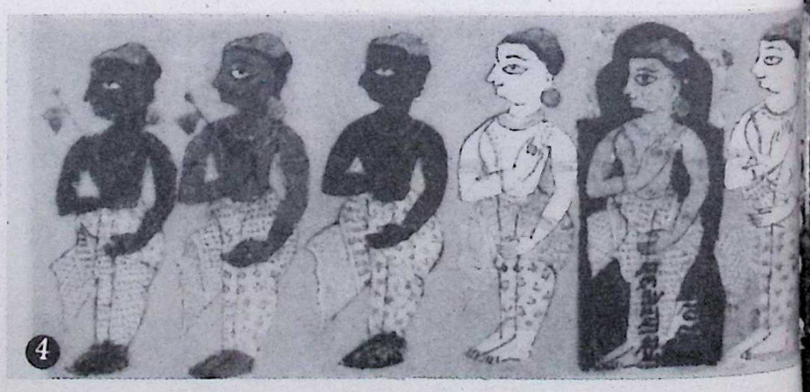
1. The Siddha-Chakra of the Shvetambara tradition. It is in the form of an eight-petal rose and the five Jain dignitaries are worshipped in this diagram.

2. The Siddha-Chakra of the Digambara tradition. It is also known as the Navadevata.

3. Ayagapata showing a stupa with Torana and railing set up by Sivayasa from Kankali Tilla, Mathura.

4. An illustration of the Jain doctrine of six leshyas from the Jain manuscript *Samgrahini Sutra* painted at Matara. The illustration shows six types of human beings of different complexions showing their inherent qualities.





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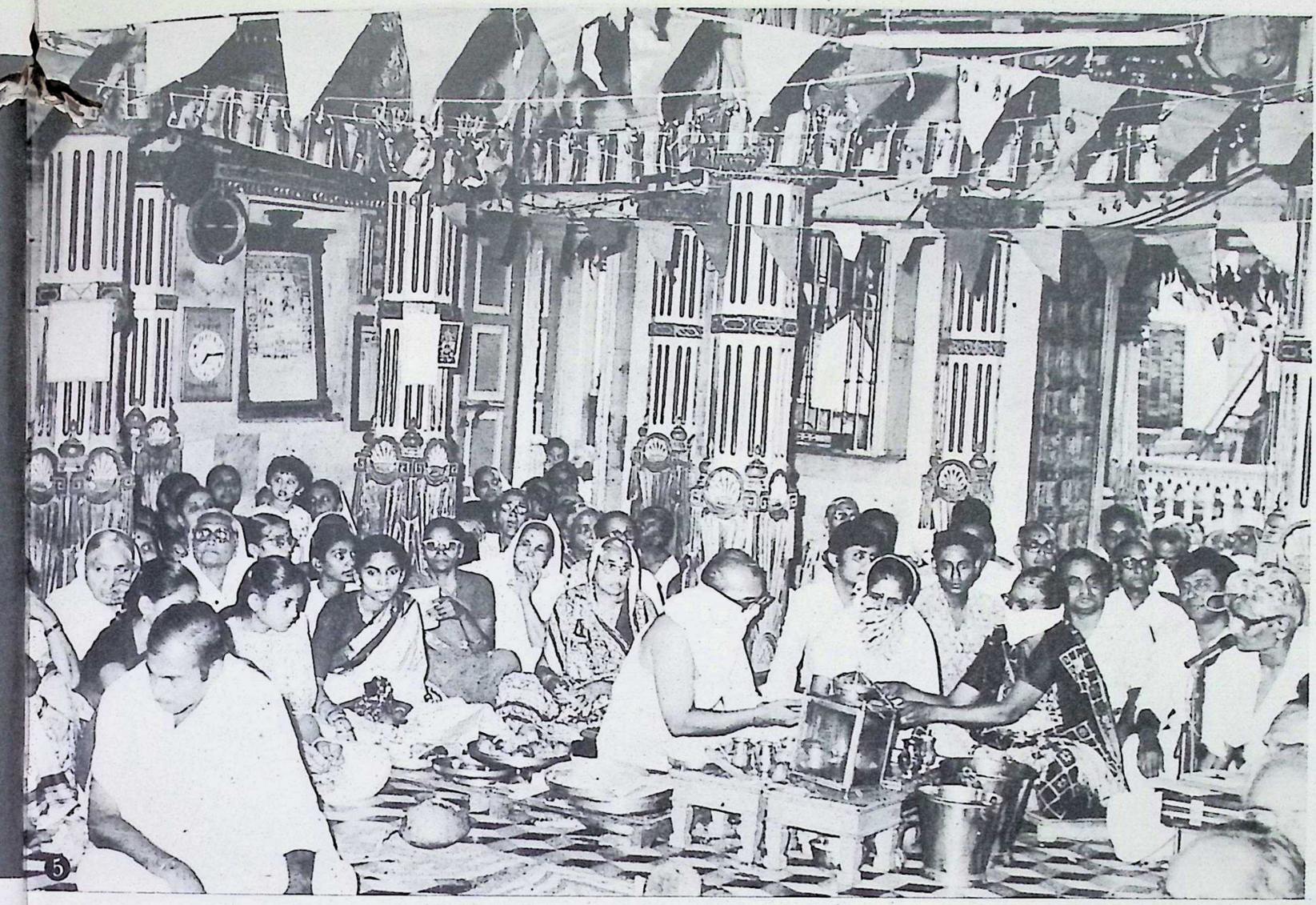

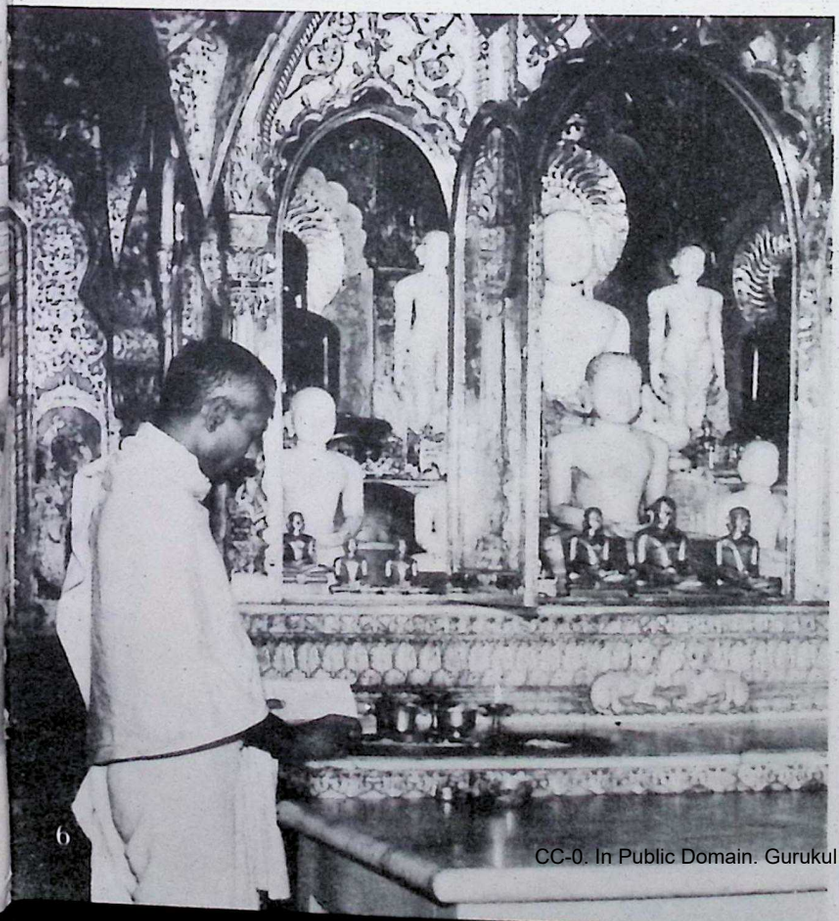

5. Bhaktambar recitation. Prayers from sacred scriptures consisting of 48 Sanskrit shlokas are offered in praise of the Tirthankara Adinatha. The text begins with the word "Bhaktambar."

6. A devotee offering prayers at a Jain temple. This usually consists of a series of pujas of idols, God, Shastras and Gurus; then of Siddha Parameshti; then of 2 or more from among the 24 Tirthankaras, according to one's capacity. During puja, the following are offered: water (symbolising renunciation), sandal (freedom from all afflictions), rice (gaining immortality), flowers (freedom from sensuous desires), cooked food as oblation (freedom from hunger), lamp (banishment of ignorance, darkness), incense (burning of ties of actions), fruits (to gain liberation), etc.

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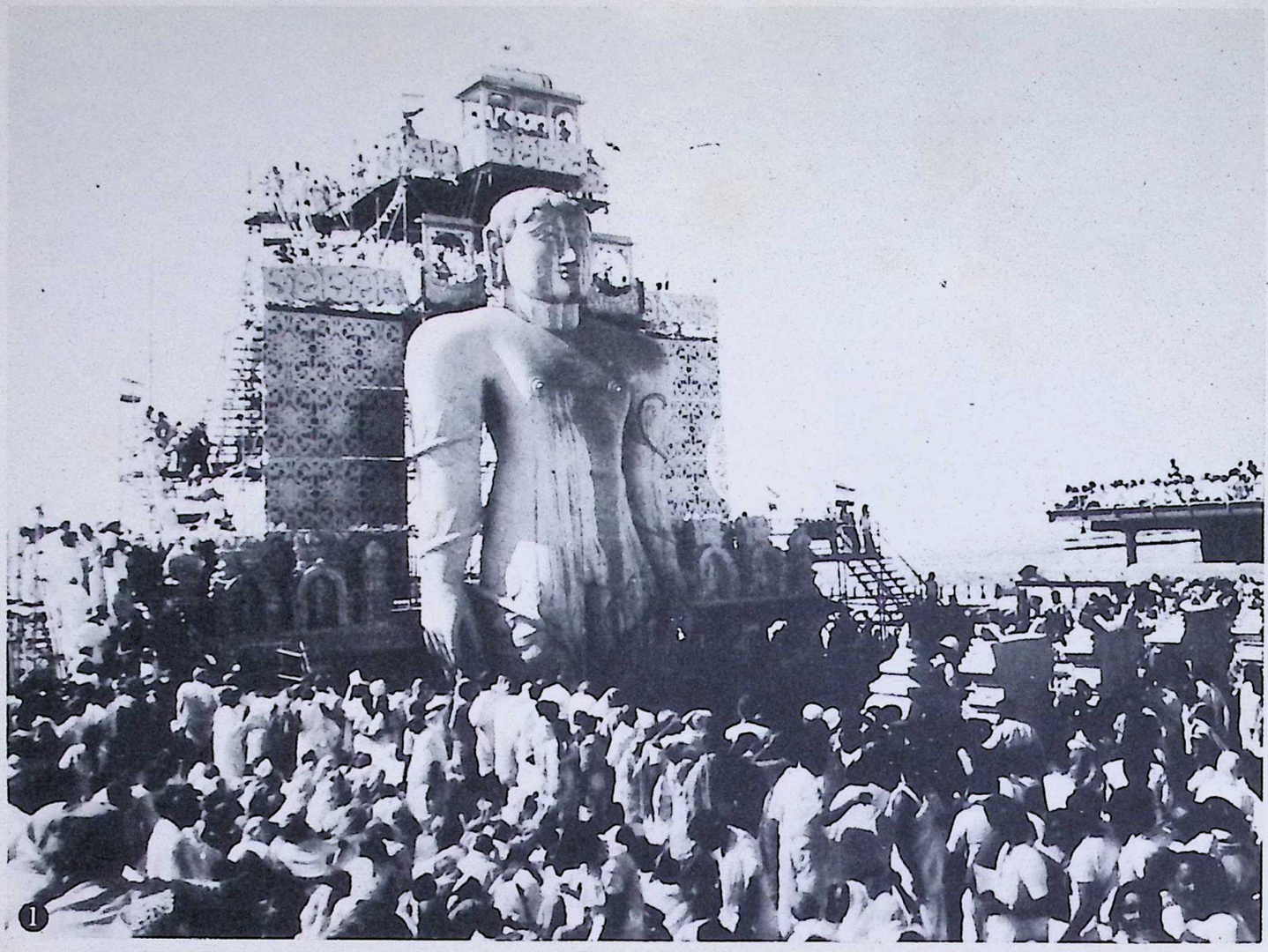

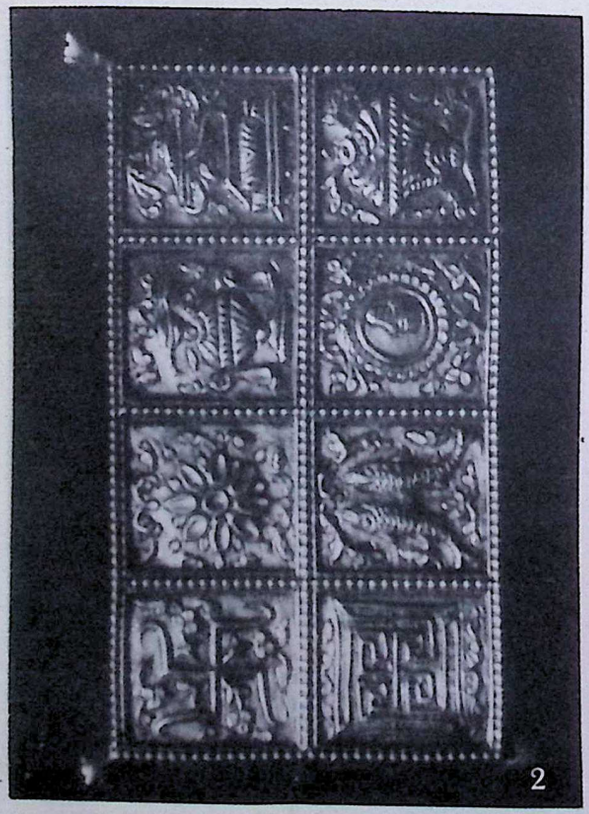

1. Lord Bahubali at Shravanabelagola in Karnataka. Pilgrims watch as holy water is poured down the 70-foot high statue. The Mahabhishekha occurs every 12 years and is attended by lakhs of Jain devotees.

2. The Ashtamangala of the Jains showing eight auspicious symbols.

3. The Siddha-Chakra puja is an old, established religious ceremony. On this occasion, Jains light and worship 108 oil lamps for eight days. This puja is specially performed during times of economic hardship or domestic distress and constitutes homage to saints who have attained liberation.

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THE DOCTRINES

Since the nature of Being is intrinsically indefinite and made up of contradictory attributes of originating, continuance and perishing, any proposition about an existing thing must somehow reflect the indefiniteness of Being, i.e., any metaphysical proposition is right from one point of view, and the contrary position is right from another. According to this doctrine, there are seven metaphysical propositions or seven modes of predication about a thing, each beginning with *syat,* meaning may be. Since the most contrary characteristics of infinite variety may be associated with a thing, affirmation made from whatever standpoint, *naya,* cannot be regarded as absolute.

There are various ways of comprehending things with subtlety by the Jain theory of methods, *nayavada,* a common sense view, or the empirical view, or the most general point of view, *sangraha-naya,* or from actual experience, *vyavahara-naya,* etc. Thus there are seven nayas, some refer to the substance and others to modifications, some arise out of nature of the subject and so on. An infinite number of affirmations about a thing may be made from infinite points of view. So no affirmation or judgement is absolutely true, no judgement is absolutely false. This is the Jain doctrine of relative pluralism, *Anekantavada,* as against the absolutism of the Upanishads and the pluralism of the Buddhists.

Vedic and Upanishadic thought, as explained by Vedanta, recognises only One Reality without a second and this is called *Brahman.* According to Shankara's school of Vedanta at least, all forms of manifestation, whether living or in the form of lifeless matter, are regarded as *mithya,* transitory, unreal or illusory. Buddha refused to answer questions about ultimate realities or speculate on them.

Jainism, however, recognised two ultimate realities and is therefore dualistic. According to Jainism, they are the *Jiva* or the living, innumerable souls and the *Ajiva* or the non-living, manifesting in the form of infinite matter particles, space and time. These are called *Astikayas.* Astikaya means anything that has some pervasiveness, and can be rendered as categories, substances or *dravyas.*

Recognition of two other elements, *Dharma* and *Adharma,* is a peculiarity of the Jains. According to Jainism, Dharma and Adharma make motion and static state, respectively, possible in space. The two Jain technical terms are to be distinguished from the same terms commonly used in the sense of merit and demerit.

Ajiva or matter is made up of five basic factors, *astikayas,* namely, motion, *dharma,* rest, *adharma,* space, *akasha,* gross matter, *pudgala,* and time *kala.* Some traditions add merit, *punya,* and demerit, *papa,* to the list of astikayas. It seems that time as an astikaya is a later view. All these basic metaphysical factors are regarded as eternal, without a beginning, all but the souls are without life and all but matter are non-corporeal. There

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is only one motion, one rest and one space, while souls and matter are infinite in number. Pudgala means matter. The smallest unit of matter is the atom, *paramanu,* which is eternal and indivisible. The atom possesses the sense of touch, colour, smell and taste. The Buddhists thought that there was no actual contact between atoms, while the Jains regarded the contact or combinations as essential and testified by experience. Compounds and further compounds produce gross objects which are however liable to constant change, *parinama,* by which they lose some of their old qualities or *gunas,* and acquire new qualities. There are four elements, earth, water, air and fire, and atoms of all these are alike in character.

Dharma is the principle of motion, just as water is to fish. Like water to a fish, Dharma cannot compel a soul to move, but the soul cannot do so without the presence of the Dharma. Dharma is devoid of taste, touch, sound, smell, colour. It pervades every part of the mundane universe, *lokakasha.* Adharma is a similar pervasive entity which helps jivas and pudgalas to keep themselves at rest.

The category of akasha is that subtle entity which pervades the universe, loka, and the transcendent region of liberated souls, aloka, which allows the subsistence of all other substances such as dharma, jiva, pudgala. It is not a mere negation or absence of obstruction, but is a positive entity which helps other things to interpenetrate it.

Time — kala — is a dravya, substance, whose function is *vartana,* i.e., to be instrumental in coming into operation of other dravyas, although the latter are automatic in their own functions. Time consists of innumerable particles which never mix with one another but which help the accession of new qualities and changes of qualities of atoms. Time, perceived as moments, hours, days, etc., is called *samaya.*

Time, in the Jain system, is an auxiliary cause of change in a substance. It is eternal and formless. The world is finite. It was never created. Space, akasha, is all-pervasive and formless providing accommodation to all objects in the Universe, and is divided into space of the Universe, *lokakasha,* and of the non-Universe, *alokakasha,* beyond it, the latter having no substance in it. The Universe is conceived as a figure with legs apart and arms akimbo, slender, circular and flat at the waist. The whole is enveloped in three atmospheres called *vata-valayas,* very dense, dense and thin.

As contrasted with the immutability of Brahman in Vedanta, Jain philosophy explains all substances to have real existence, characterised by origin, *utpada,* decay, *vyaya,* and continuity, *dhrauvya.* In the words of Dr. Hiralal Jaina, 'it may thus be said to reconcile seemingly the opposite views of Vedanta and Buddhist philosophy, the latter emphasises the momentariness of all existence, *kshanikatva.*'

The world, with its constituent elements — the six dravyas or the five astikayas and time — is infinite, eternal, never created. The essential characteristic of souls, jivas, is consciousness or mental function, *chetana.*

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Non-living substances cause souls to assume bodies and become involved in corporeal functions.

Jainism does not recognise the need for existence of a personal god as an agency for creation, preservation, or destruction of the world or for dispensing justice. According to Jainism, the Universe and all its elements and processes are regarded as uncreated and eternal, sustained by its own inner or inherent forces.

Jiva, or the life-principle, in its pure state, possesses the qualities of unending perception, *ananta-jnana,* limitless knowledge, *ananta-darshana,* infinite bliss, *ananta-sukha* and infinite power, *anant-virya.* Jiva, or atman or soul is eternal, although subject to changes in state, parinama. According to the Samkhya, the Vaisheshika and the Vedanta systems, the Jivatman or the individual soul is a-parinami, changeless in all states and at all times. The soul possesses activity or energy unlike Samkhya and other systems which declare the soul to be an inactive or passive witness and the *Prakriti* to be the real agent of all activity. Jiva or the individual soul, in Jain belief, is the door of all actions resulting in the cycles of birth and death, happiness and misery, heaven and hell and attains *moksha* or complete destruction of all bondage of Karma.

Souls are formless and many and cannot be perceived by the senses. A soul is not all-pervasive but can, by contraction or expansion, occupy a portion of space. Like the light of a lamp in a small or large room, a soul can fill a small or large body it occupies. But the soul is not identical with the body.

By nature each soul is pure, possessing infinite knowledge, power and bliss, but these faculties are obstructed by foreign matter coming in contact with the soul. Fine foreign matter producing the chain of cause and effect, birth and death, is *karman,* a substance, a fine atomic particle, sukshma-pudgala-paramanu, and not a process, as in Hinduism. How this fine atomic substance can first contact the pure soul is not properly explained. In fact, this problem of the first fall of man is hardly satisfactorily explained by reasoning in any religious system. Some faiths try to explain it with the help of mythology.

The Soul's Journey

Before becoming free from all karma-bondage, a soul passes through various stages of spiritual development. These stages of the soul's progress, *gunasthanas,* consist of progressive manifestations of the innate faculties of knowledge and power and are characterised by decreasing sinfulness and increasing purity. *Samvara* or stoppage of influx, *asrava* of karma is achieved through several practices. These include the *Samitis* or vigilance on behaviour, such as the *bhasha-samiti, irya-samiti,* etc., 3 *guptis* or protections, viz., *mano-gupti, vak-gupti* and *kaya-gupti,* 22 *parishahas* or endurances of various kinds of miseries, molestations, etc.,

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observance of 5 kinds of *charitras* or rules of conduct, and of 10 dharmas or duties and practice of 12 types of *bhavanas* or reflections.

Liberation from all karma-bondage is *moksha.* The entire system of Jain tenets is summed up under nine *tattvas* or *padarthas* — Jiva, ajiva, punya, papa, asrava, bandha, samvara, *nirjara* and moksha.

Karma-bondage results in various modifications of consciousness consisting of *kashayas* in the form of anger, pride, deceit, greed, etc. Karma-bondage is of four kinds according to its nature, duration, intensity, quantity. Binding Karma is of eight fundamental types — mula-prakritis, namely, knowledge-obscuring, *jnanavaraniya,* intuition-obscuring, *darshana-varaniya,* feeling-producing, *vedaniya,* belief and conduct-obscuring, *mohaniya,* age-determining, *ayush-karma,* personality-determining, *nama-karma,* status-determining, *gotra-karma,* power-hindering, *anataraya-karma.* Of the various finer sub-varieties of these karmas, about one hundred and fifty-eight are given. The intensity of the effect of karma depends on the strength or weakness of the passion, kashayas.

The binding of a new karma can be prevented through control, gupti, of the activities of the body, speech and mind, care, samiti, in walking, speaking, handling things, and through moral virtues, dharma, reflection, *anupreksha,* patient endurance of troubles, *parishaha-jaya,* and right conduct, *charitra.*

Leshyas

Due to the connection of jiva with ajiva or karmic matter, souls obtain different kinds of bodies. The Jains believe that a deified soul can actually be "stained" by karmas and would take a particular shade indicative of its spiritual level. According as good or bad karma matter sticks to the soul, the soul gets coloured — golden, lotus-pink, white, black, blue or grey. These are called *leshyas.* The different states of mind or of spiritual advancement of embodied souls are called leshyas, are of six kinds, each leshya has its own distinctive colour, touch, smell and taste. As Zimmer puts it, "the subtle substance of the life-monad, jiva, mingles with particles of karma, like water with milk or fire with iron in a red-hot glowing iron ball. Moreover, the karmic matter communicates colours, leshyas, to the life-monad, and those six colours, mentioned above, fall into three groups of two, each pair corresponding precisely to one of the gunas or natural qualities of classical Samkhya and Vedantic writings. Thus the leshyas dove-grey — *kapota-leshya,* and flaming — *tejas-leshya,* correspond to the *rajas-guna,* the dark-blue—*nila,* and black, *krishna, leshyas* corresponding to the *tamo-guna* and the yellow or rosy — *padma,* and white — *shukla, leshyas* correspond to the *sattva-guna.* Compare here the *Bhagvadgita,* 14, 5-9.

In the *Digha-Nikaya,* a somewhat similar conception of six *abhijatis* is attributed to Mankhali Goshalaka, the Ajivika leader. In the *Anguttara*

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Nikaya, six abhijatis are reported as the opinion of Purana Kassapa. The six abhijatis are *krishna, nila, lohita-rakta, haridra-pita, shukla* and *parama-shukla.* Zimmer wrote: "Six leshyas seem to represent some system of archaic prototypes from which the basic elements of the vastly influential later theory of gunas was evolved."

Knowledge is the innate attribute of the soul whose chief characteristic is *chetana* or consciousness consisting of knowledge, jnana and intuition, darshana. But worldly jivas, obscured by the veil of four destructive, *ghatin,* karmas, namely, jnanavaraniya, darshanavaraniya, mohaniya and antaraya, do not enjoy infinite knowledge, power, bliss, etc.

Jainism speaks of the following types of knowledge. Four stages of perception — observation, will to recognise, determination and impression — lead to subjective cognition or *mati-jnana,* the first of the five kinds of knowledge. The second is the *shruta-jnana,* derived from scriptures and information. Both mati and shruta are mediate cognitions, *paroksha-jnana,* which is of three kinds — *avadhi* or supersensory perception, *manah-paryaya* or thought-reading, and *kevala* or final cognition, revealing past, present and future. This last is the stage of omniscience accompanied by freedom from all karma-bondage and is the direct experience of the soul's pure form undefiled by pudgala-matter.

Yoga, according to Jainism, is the cause of moksha. Yoga consists of knowledge of reality as it is, jnana, faith in teachings of the Tirthankaras, *shraddha,* and right conduct and cessation from doing evil leading to release from karma-bondage, charitra. Yoga is thus constituted of three jewels, *ratna-traya* — right belief, right knowledge and right conduct, *samyak-darshana, samyak-jnana* and *samyak-charitra.*

The three jewels cannot exist exclusively of each other. Though right conduct is the direct means of liberation, it can lead to it only when accompanied by the other two jewels. Right faith is described as faith in seven predicaments, *sapta-bhangi* of the Jains explained below, in the nine categories and the six substances, faith in liberated souls and in Jain scriptures and principles. Essential to right faith are freedom from doubts and desires, steadfastness, brotherhood towards fellow-followers of the faith and propagation of truth.

Of the various fundamental elements of Jain Philosophy, only two — the self and the non-self — are dealt with from a metaphysical view-point, the rest are corollaries to the problem of getting rid of the karma-bondage of the jiva by a course of discipline leading to salvation. The ethical aspect of Jain teachings is very much entwined with the philosophical one and the emphasis is always on the way to salvation, on the soul's going back to its original pure and perfect nature.

Two separate courses of conduct are laid down for ascetics and householders. In both cases the code of morals is based on the doctrine

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of ahimsa. Thought being the father of action, violence in thought, bhava-himsa, precedes physical injury, dravya-himsa. Violence in thought arises from passions, ideas of attachment and aversion, etc., due to one's negligence, pramada, in behaviour. Violence in thought is the greater and subtler form of violence.

The life of a lay follower or a householder is only a preparatory stage to the rigorous life of an ascetic necessary for obtaining salvation. The lay votary is enjoined to observe eight mula-gunas or primary qualities variously listed, which mainly relate to avoidance of meat, wine, honey, fruits, roots, night-eating, etc. and twelve vows made up of 5 *anuvratas, guna-vratas* and *shiksha-vratas.* The anuvratas are primary or smaller vows of desisting from gross violence, gross falsehood and gross stealing, contentment with one's own wife and limitation of possessions. These are related to, or rather are the abridged editions of, the five *Yamas* or *Mahavratas,* of *ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya* and *aparigraha* which a lay follower can observe only partially; hence they are called anuvratas.

JAIN MONKS

A Niggantha-samana, Nirgranthashramana, has to keep a watchful eye over his observances. The Shvetambaras refer to two main types of Jain monks — (1) *Jina-kalpins* who wandered naked and used the hollow of their palms for eating or drinking and kept no possessions, and (2) *Sthavira-kalpins* who put on robes, kept an alms-bowl, sweeping-duster, *rajoharana,* and *mukha-vastrika,* piece of cloth to be held against the mouth for preventing entry of insects, and other necessary articles. Every Jain monk had to guard himself against injury to all kinds of life, telling lies, stealing, sexual intercourse, possessions, all these listed as the five Mahavratas, taking meals at night, using a sofa, etc.

A person was initiated and confirmed as monk after a probation period as *antevasin.* A *thera* was a monk of long standing, an elder. An *uvajjhaya, upadhyaya,* was the chief reader and instructor of a group of monks. An *ayariya, acharya,* was the head of a group of monks, later also called a *suri.*

A full-fledged Digambara monk remains naked. Of lower grade are the *Kshullakas* wearing a loin-cloth and a cloth-piece one and a half yards long, while the *Ailakas* keep only a loin-cloth. Both, however, keep an alms-bowl, a rajoharana, broom of peacock feathers, stay in monasteries or outside human habitations and beg and take food only once a day. They are ascetics who have perfected the practice of the eleventh *pratima.*

ART AND ICONOGRAPHY

In ancient India, before the introduction of image-worship, certain symbols were worshipped. And it seems certain that trees were regarded as sacred and haunted by spirits. Spirits like Yakshas and Nagas were worshipped from very early times and the worship was perhaps of a non-Aryan origin later adopted by the Aryans, just as phallus-worship was

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later adopted by the Vedic Aryans. Similarly, worship of funeral memorial mounds is of hoary antiquity. They were the *Aidukas* of the Dravidians, and worship of such mounds became more popular with the Buddhists and for some time with Jainism in its earlier stages. We hear of a stupa of Munisuvrata, one of the twenty-four Jain Tirthankaras, at Vishala in early Jain literature. At Mathura existed perhaps five Jain stupas and a group of Jain monks was known as *Pancha-stupaanvaya.* Of these five stupas, one stupa was very old and was called *Devanirmita* in inscriptions. Later traditions say that it was a stupa of Suparshvanatha, the seventh Tirthankara, but it is more likely that it was dedicated to Parshvanatha. Perhaps it is the same as the stupa from Kankali Tila, Mathura, whose antiquities excavated by Fuhrer are now well-known and mostly preserved in the museums at Mathura and Lucknow.

Earlier still is the torso of a Tirthankara image in Kayotsarga mudra, showing high Mauryan polish on the surface, obtained from Lohanipur near Patna, site of ancient Pataliputra, during excavations from the foundations of a square temple, 8 ft. 10 in. each side, which is the earliest known plan of a Jain shrine. From this area were found punch-marked coins.

Image-worship was introduced at a very early stage in Jainism. Unlike Buddha, Mahavira never prohibited worship of his images nor did he prescribe it. There is no scope for worship of a godhead in Jain philosophy since Jainism does not believe in a creator-god. As a cult, worship of images of Tirthankaras, regarded as highest gods — Devadhidevas — does not seem to have started in the age of Parshvanatha nor in the age of Mahavira, except possibly for a few paintings or sculptures, especially in wood, as can be seen from the account of Uddayana and his queen at Vitabhayapattana worshipping a life-size wooden portrait statue of Mahavira, known as the Jivantasvami image, from the fact that it was carved when the Lord, *svami,* was alive, *Jivanta.* It is said that the portrait was fashioned when Mahavira, shortly before renunciation, was meditating in his palace, in the standing kayotsarga posture, with the crown, ornament and garment on his person. All later Mahavira images of this iconography were worshipped as Jivantasvami images.

Excavations of the Jain stupa at Mathura have revealed several antiquities showing worship of Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, or Shrutadevata, and of Tirthankara images, in the standing as well as the sitting posture, with figures of sadhu, sadhvi, shravaka, on the pedestal showing in the centre a *dharma-chakra* on a pillar. Inscriptions on some of these show that most of the finds of the stupa date from the Kushana period.

Tirthankara images from Mathura are shown without a garment when in the standing attitude. In the sitting padmasana posture, the nudity is not visible. It is certain that till about the late fifth century A.D., both the Shvetambara and Digambara sects of the Jains worshipped Tirthankara images without any garment shown on them. The earliest Shvet-

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ambara Jina image, i.e., an image showing a lower garment, so far discovered, dates from about the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. It is a metal image of standing Rishabhanatha obtained in the Akota hoard of Jain bronzes from western India.

In the south, the earliest Jain finds so far discovered are the Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions on stone beds used by Jain monks staying in natural caves or caverns in different parts of Tamil Nadu. The inscriptions range from *c.* third century B.C. to *c.* fourth century A.D. In Karnataka, no antiquities earlier than the fourth century A.D. have as yet been discovered and a fifth-century Kadamba grant speaks of some gifts for worship, etc. to the Digambara, Shvetambara and Yapaniya sects of Jains. In Andhra, an inscription of a descendant of Kharavela of Kalinga has been found.

Cave temples on the Udayagiri and Khandagiri mountains, Orissa, were excavated by Kharavela and his queen in the second or first century B.C. Here the Navamuni and the Barabhuji caves may be later but are interesting for the rows of sculptures of Tirthankaras and their Yakshinis carved on the walls. On top of the Khandagiri mountain, Debala Mitra excavated the ruins of a Jain temple, apsidal in plan and probably dating from the age of Kharavela. The Jain monks used to live in caves and under trees.

The Ayagapatas obtained from Kankali Tila, Mathura, have shown that in the Kushana period, worship of the stupa and eight auspicious symbols was popular. The Ayagapata dedicated by Vasu, daughter of Lonashobhika, is called a *shilapata* in the inscription, and in the Buddhist reliefs from Bharhut, we find scenes of worship of such Shilapatas on *simhasanas* placed under trees, just as they are described in Jain canons in the context of Purnabhadra and other Yaksha-Chaityas. The Mathura Ayagapatas further show that the Jains used to install tall pillars surmounted by the Dharmachakra, in front of the Jina-temple or a Jain stupa. They also used to install another type of pillar in front of the temples in the Kushana period. Such a pillar was surmounted by a symbol, a lion, or a bull, or an elephant, etc., which was the Dhvaja-symbol of the Jina in front of whose temple the pillar was erected. In short, besides the Dharmachakra pillars, there were *Dhvaja-stambhas.* The practice was common to Hinduism, Buddhism as well as to Jainism in ancient times. The Jains also installed another type of pillar known as *Manastambhas* which had Jina figures either on top or at the bottom or both on the top and the bottom. Some of these had figures facing each of the four directions. Such loose sculptures with a Jina figure facing each of the four directions were also installed when they were called *Pratima-Sarvatobhadrika* in inscriptions from Mathura. The same conception is behind the *Chaturmukha-Shivalingas.*

To view such a fourfold image in a temple sanctum, naturally four entrances from four different directions had to be provided. This led to the practice of erecting Chaturmukha or Chaumukha Jain shrines.

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Miniature paintings from Jain Bhandaras, so far discovered, have provided us with a continuous history of painting in Northern and Western India, beginning from *c.* tenth century up to the end of the nineteenth century A.D. Miniatures of the *Kalpasutra,* the *Kalaka Katha,* the *Uttaradhyayansutra,* the *Yashodhara Charitra,* the *Samgrahanisutra,* the *Shripalal Rasa,* the *Ogha Niryukti,* the *Dhavala, Mahadhavala,* etc. are now well known and published. Borders of the Kalpasutra from Devashana-pada, Ahmedabad, painted at Gandhara near Broach on the West Coast in 1475 A.D. have labelled painted figures illustrating various postures, etc. according to the *Natyashastra* of Bharata.

Metal-casting was patronised on a large scale by the Jains. Thousands of metal images of various dates, sizes and styles, installed for worship, are still preserved in numerous temples all over India. Some rare and beautiful specimens are now collected in different museums of India and abroad. A small standing Parshvanatha, mostly of copper, from an unknown find-spot, preserved in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, must be dated at least in the first century B.C. Some bronzes obtained from a hoard at Chausa in Bihar, now in the Patna Museum, date from the Kushana period. Another hoard in the same museum also from Bihar belongs to the medieval period. Some beautiful bronzes ranging from the fifth, sixth, seventh centuries upto about the eleventh century, obtained from the Akota hoard, now in the Baroda Museum, have thrown much light on the evolution of Yaksha-Yakshini worship in Jainism, on the history of the Shvetambara Church, and on the age of differentiation of Shvetambara and Digambara images.

The contribution of Jains to architecture is very great. On sites like Shatrunjaya in Saurashtra, Gujarat, the Mt. Sameta Shikhara in Bihar, on the hill at Deogadh, at Suvarnagiri, Muktagiri, etc., in Madhya Pradesh, and at various other sites, temple-cities have grown. At Shravana Belagola, Humcha, Kambadahalli, Mudabidri, Bhatkal, Lakhundi, Tiruparrutikunram or Jina-Kanchi, etc. in the South, at sites like Gyaraspur and Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh and Mt. Abu in Rajasthan and at Oshia, Nadol, Nadlai, Sadadi, Ghanerav, Sevadi, Ranakpur and other sites in the same state, we have some finest examples of architecture as well as sculpture. Temples at Girnar and Kumbharia in Gujarat are noteworthy.

Shravana Belagola in Karnataka is especially famous for the 56 ft. high stone statue of Bahubali or Gomateshvara installed in the tenth century where every twelfth year a bathing ceremony is magnificently celebrated by the Digambara Jains in India. Though smaller in size, two more such colossal images of Bahubali exist at Karkal and Venur in Karnataka.

JAINISM AND OTHER FAITHS

Like *Samkhya-Yoga, Nyaya-Vaisheshika,* Vedanta and Buddhist systems, Jainism believes that the association of karma with the soul is beginningless, the beginning being absolutely beyond human knowledge. There is

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no periodic dissolution and creation of the Universe as in the Hindu Puranas. Nor is there any place for creator God. Every individual soul, in its pure state of emancipation, becomes the object of worship for the common men. Jainism is called a *nastika-darshana* along with Buddhists and Charvakas, materialists, as non-believers in Vedic authorities and in the existence of a creator God. The Nirishvara Samkhya also rejects the theory of creation of the Universe, nor do we find a creator God in the *Purva-Mimamsa.* Even in Vedanta, the concrete world is interpreted as a manifestation of Brahman, the ultimate reality.

Both the Jains and the Hindus believe in the doctrine of karma being the basic principle of *samsara,* world with its cycle of birth and death, and rebirth.

In spite of doctrinal differences, Jainism seems to have been largely influenced by the Hindu yoga and tantra, magic and ritual, by Hindu mythology and accounts of the Puranas about the lives of Rama, Krishna and others and by several social customs. The Hindus seem to have recognised the value of Jain ethics by according to Rishabhanatha in their usual process of assimilation, a typical Hindu feature the position of a great sage in the *Bhagavata Purana.*

The ethical concept of the five great vows or the *Chaturyama* of Parshvanatha, may be compared with the *Chhandogya Upanishad,* 3.17.4, giving the fundamental virtues of penance, *tapa,* liberality, *dana,* straight dealing, *arjavam,* non-violence, *ahimsa,* and truth, *satyavachana.*

Both Jainism and Buddhism revolted against the Brahmanical division of class by birth, sacrificial violence, authority of the Vedas, etc. Both assimilated common Indian conceptions of Indra, Brahma, Yakshas and other deities, symbol worship, such as the stupa, dharma-chakra, Chaitya-trees, ratna-traya, etc. Buddha asked his monks to move, travel and preach for the good of the many.

Both Buddhism and Jainism were concerned with suffering and the cycle of birth and death, both attempted solutions in their own ways. Jainism laid more stress on rigorous austerities and total abstention from possessions.

The differences which separate Jainism from Hinduism and Buddhism are largely differences of emphasis, for all have been constituted from common material. Ahimsa, for example, is preponderant in, but nor peculiar to, Jainism. . . but it is the central position and pervading character of ahimsa that separates the Jain ethic sharply from Hinduism as well as from Islam and Christianity, according to R. Williams.

The Jain influence at the Moghul court of Akbar is a bright chapter in Jain Church history. Hiravijaya Suri, the then leader of the Shvetambara Tapa gaccha, was invited and honoured by Akbar. His disciples and some other monks also received respect from Jehangir, Shahjahan and even

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Aurangzeb. Akbar had issued *firmans* prohibiting animal-slaughter near the Jain sites at Girnar, Shatrunjaya, Abu, Rajgir and Parasnath hill during the Pajjusana festival. Jehangir also issued firmans for protection of Shatrunjaya and Aurangzeb gave a firman in favour of Shantidas Sheth of Ahmedabad, donating proprietary rights over the Shatrunjaya mount.

Indian culture is a complex edifice which is the joint production of three major Indian faiths, Brahmanism or Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, along with several other smaller systems. The great contribution of Jainism and Buddhism in helping the process of assimilation of all foreign tribes in India, along with their language, customs, arts, cults, etc., cannot be overlooked. Jain writers have also contributed largely to the recording of history, manners, customs, etc. of different periods in different regions. In the field of art and architecture, the Jain contribution is both great and significant.

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The Scriptures

Dharma, i.e. (that which consists of the practice of) Non-violence, Self-control and Austerity, is the most auspicious thing (in this life). Gods too respect him whose mind is ever engaged in (the practice of) Dharma.

Dhashvaikalika Sutra, 1.1

A wise man should practise the Dharma taught by the Jina, taking recourse to (the practice of) the five Great Vows made up of non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy and non-attachment to possessions.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra, 21.12

Non-injury to all living beings, non-acceptance of what is not given, refrain from treachery and untruth—this is the Dharma accepted by the sages.

Sutrakrotanga Sutra, 1.8.19

One must practise Dharma before old age torments, diseases increase and the senses fail to function.

Dashavaikalika Sutra, 8.36

One must never destroy nor impel others to kill in this world any beings—whether of the trasa class or the sthavara class—whether deliberately or even unwittingly,or unconsciously.

Dashavaikalika Sutra, 6.9

All beings want to live, no one wishes to die.
Therefore, the Nirgranthas (Jain followers) avoid the ghastly act of killing all animals.

Dashavaikalika Sutra, 6.10

Dharma, Adharma, Space, Time, Matter and Souls (are the six kinds of substances); they make up this world, as has been taught by the Jinas who possess the best knowledge. (7)

The characteristic of Dharma is motion, that of Adharma immobility, and that of Space, which contains all other substances, is to make room (for everything). (9)

The characteristic of Time is duration, that of soul realisation of knowledge, faith, happiness and misery. (10)

The characteristic of Soul is knowledge, faith, conduct, austerities, energy, and realisation (of its development). (11)

The characteristic of Matter is sound, darkness, lustre (of jewels, etc.), light, shade, sunshine, colour, taste, smell and touch. (12)

Uttaradhyayana sutra, 28-7, 9-12

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A wise man who has become awakened should turn away from sin, when he considers the evils arising from slaughter and the great dangers entailed by his cruel disposition.

Sutrakritanga Sutra, 1.10.21

Equanimity (impartiality) towards all beings, whether friends or foes, in this world, and abstention from injury to all living beings throughout one's existence is a duty difficult to practise.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra, 19.25

To be never indifferent to or careless in abstaining from falsehood and to be always careful to speak wholesome truth is a duty difficult to accomplish.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra, 19.26

All gentlemen (noble men) have despised untruthful speech.
Falsehood generates distrust amongst beings;
hence falsehood should be avoided.

Dashavaikalika Sutra, 6.12

A person desirous of attaining to the nature of his true Self (desirous of realising his Atman, the true self) should always resort to speech which is completely devoid of ambiguity and is quite explicit, free from doubts and which reports, in limited words only, facts as they have been observed.

Dashavaikalika Sutra, 8.49

From the desire of pleasure arises the misery of the whole world, the gods included; whatever misery of body and mind there is, the dispassionate will put an end to it.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra, 32.19

He who owns even a small property in living or lifeless things, or consents to others holding it, will not be delivered from misery.

Sutrakritanga Sutra, 1.1.1.2

He who is exempt from love, hatred, and fear (and who shines forth) like burnished gold, purified in fire, him we call a Brahmin.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra, 25.21

He who thoroughly knows living beings, whether they know him or not, and does not injure them in any of the three ways (i.e. in thought, word and deed), him we call a Brahmin.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra, 25.23

He who does not speak untruth from anger or for fun, from greed or from fear, him we call a Brahmin.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra 25.24

One does not become a shramana by tonsure, nor a Brahmin by the sacred syllable Om, nor a Muni by living in the woods, nor a Tapasa by wearing. (the clothes of) Kusha grass and bark.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra, 25.31

One becomes a shramana by equanimity, a Brahmin by chastity, a Muni by knowledge, and a Tapasa by penance.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra 25.32

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Festivals

Panchakalyanakas (five auspicious events) took place in the life of each Tirthankara. The most popular are those of Mahavira, Rishabhanatha and Parshvanatha. The five auspicious events are: (1) descent in the mother's womb *(cyavana, garbhadhana)*, (2) date of birth *(janma-kalyanaka)*, (3) renunciation *(diskha-k)*, (4) emancipation or liberation from ignorance and *karma*-bondage *(kevala-jnana)*, and (5) death *(nirvana)*, when with the extinction of the body, complete liberation including liberty from the bondage of the body is obtained.

Oli (April and October): Celebrated twice a year for nine days, a *tapa* known as *Oli* is practised during the months of Chaitra (April) and Ashwin (October) when the *siddha-chakra* diagram *(yantra)* representing the Five Parameshthins, along with *jnana, darshana, charitra* and *tapa* (according to the Shvetambaras and *chaitya, chaityalaya, shruta* and *dharma-chakra* according to the Digambaras) is worshipped daily. The observer of *Oli* keeps a special fast, eats and drinks as per prescribed rules, taking food prepared from only one kind of grain each day.

Pajjushana (August or September): This festival occurs in the month of Bhadrapada beginning with the 13th day of the dark half of Bhadrapada and ending after eight days on the 5th day of the bright half of Bhadrapada, according to the calculation of months ending on the full moon day. Among the Shvetambara groups of monks, it begins and ends one day earlier.

Parjjushana (Sanskrit: Paryushana) is given a different name, *Dashalakshana* by the Digambara group of monks. This starts immediately after the ending of the Shvetambara *Pajjushana* festival.

Bhadrapada Shukla Panchami (August or September): At the end of Pajjushana is an ancient Indian festival of the Hindus and is known as *Rishi-Panchami,* the day of sages. *Pajjushana* literally means service rendered with whole-hearted effort and devotion. On the last day, the Jains distribute alms to the poor and take out a Jina image in a car *(ratha)* in a procession through the streets headed by an ornamented *Indra-dhvaja.* During this festival of the Shvetambaras, the *kalpa-sutra* describing the lives of Tirthankaras is read before the laity by the monks. Miniature illustrations of manuscripts of this text are shown and worshipped. The last day is a day of fasting. Some pious monks, nuns and the laity observe eight or more days of fast. During the festival an annual *pratikramana* or confession is performed for atonement of all conscious or unconscious misdeeds or wrongs done and for the removal of mutual ill-feelings.

Diwali (October or November): Also known as Deepavali, it is observed by all Hindu communities as a day of rejoicing by worshipping the Goddess of Wealth. This festival represents an ancient festive day called *Yaksha-Ratri* or the night sacred to the Yakshas whose worship has been adopted and assimilated by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. However, for the Jains, it is a very sacred day, which marks the *nirvana* of Mahavira. It is celebrated everywhere, but especially at Pavapuri in Bihar by Jain pilgrims, since Mahavira is said to have obtained *nirvana* at Pavapuri.

Jaana-Panchami (October or November): This festival falls five days after Diwali and is celebrated by Jains by performing temple-worship, especially worship of scriptures in manuscript form. This marks the end of four months' compulsory stay of the monks at one place during the monsoon.

The Jains also participate in the festivals and fairs of the region they happen to live in. They join the Hindus in celebrating Holi, Makara Sankranti, Navaratri, Raksha-Bandhan and others. The Jains of the south celebrate Hindu festivals like Pongal, the Tamilian harvest festival, Kartik, Yugadi, the new year of the Saraswats, Gauri, etc., adopting local customs and practices.

Like the Hindus, the individual Jains celebrate ending of special vows *(vratas)* and fasts of different types, some of which may be expiatory and others different kinds of penances *(tapa).*

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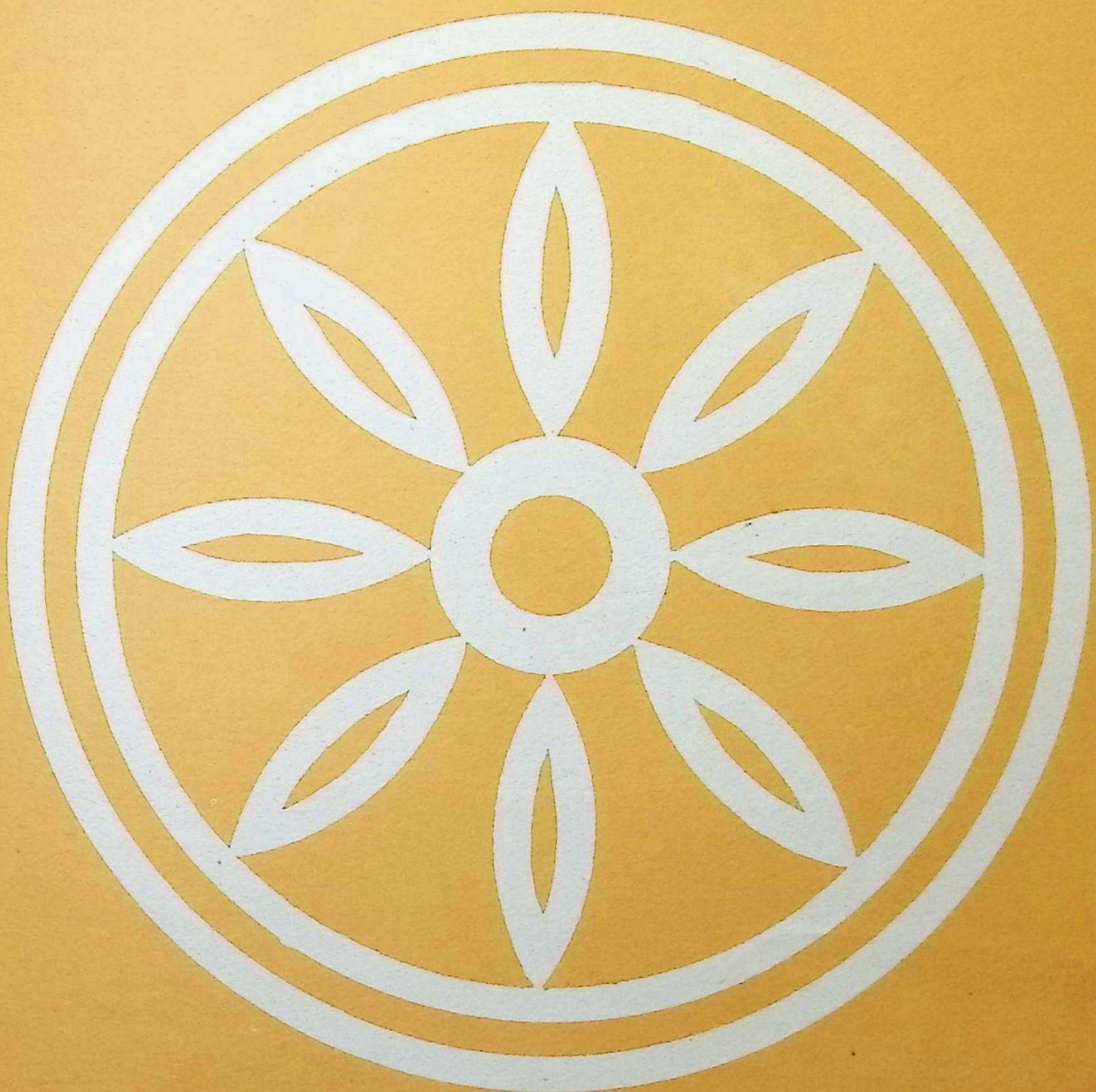

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सब्बपापस्स अकरणं, कुसलस्स उपसम्पदा।
सचित्तपरियोदपनं, एतं बुद्धान सासनं॥

Abstinence from all evil,
Fulfilment of all good,
Purification of one's mind,
This is the teaching of Buddhas.

Dhammapada 183

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Buddhism

Having originated in India, this great religion spread beyond its frontiers during Ashoka's time and afterwards penetrated into the major parts of Southeast Asia, China and the Far East. Of late, its influence has been rapidly growing not only in the East but also in the West. Today every fourth person in the world is a Buddhist. In fact, Buddhism is more a spiritual philosophy than a religion. Its attitude towards life has been placid and matter-of-fact and its path is practical. Its emphasis on ethics, humanism, compassion and wisdom has all that can make it a universal religion.

The range of Buddhism is vast. In time it covers more than 2500 years. In space, it covers the Theravada countries like Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and parts of Bangladesh and India and the Mahayana countries, viz., Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Mongolia, Korea, Vietnam, Japan and China, although China is not strictly a Buddhist country as Taoism and Confucianism are also equally important religions there. However, Buddhism has dominated the thought of China for several centuries.

Wherever Buddhism spread, it influenced the indigenous culture of the country, be it China or Japan, Korea or Thailand. The art of the T'sang dynasty of China is considered to be one of the finest in the world and it is largely a Buddhist art. Various pagodas, *wats* or temples and beautiful images of the Buddha, stupas of Sanchi, caves of Ajanta, pillars of Ashoka with their capitals are a testimony to the exquisite art that developed under the influence of Buddhism. Also, Buddhism set such standards of tolerance, gentleness and compassion towards the lower forms of life that, in the religious history of the world, we find few parallels.

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Buddhism is the understanding of the teaching — for which the technical word is *sasana* or *dhamma*—of Gautama, the Buddha, and the religion and philosophy which have grown around that teaching during the Master's lifetime and during the succeeding centuries after his great passing away, *mahaparinirvana.*

Sometimes Buddhism is wrongly presented as pessimistic. If this were true, we would not have found its adherents today in Burma, Thailand and other Theravada countries happy and merry, perhaps the merriest — as some observers have pointed out — people on earth.

Ironically, Buddhism is a religion without the conception of God. It may be included in the category of mystic religions in as much as it strives for inner purity and intuitive realization of the oneness of the universe.

Buddhism always fought against caste, colour and such other distinctions. It supported the freedom of women and their right to reach the higher spiritual realms. Its love for animals and nature is deeply reflected in scriptures. An enemy is to be won not by hatred but by love, for, as the *Dhammapada* (verse 5) says,

In this world,
hatred never ceases by hatred
but by non-hatred.
This is the eternal law

Buddhism has always aimed at raising the quality of life, not the outward standard of living. There is little importance to 'self' in Buddhism. On the contrary, the self must be eliminated (see the Buddhist theory of *Anatman-Anatta*) to enter into enlightenment, for the idea of attachment to the 'self' or selfishness leads to various vices and desires whereby one seeks worldly comforts now here, now there, little caring for the miseries and sufferings of others.

The contribution of Buddhism in the realm of mass media is no less important. It considered no language sacrosanct. In spite of the insistence of some *bhikkhus* or monks, brahmins by birth, that the Buddha should preach in Vedic Sanskrit, he refused to oblige and instructed his disciples to preach his doctrine in the people's own language. His liberal attitude impressed the masses and that was one of the reasons for the popularity of Buddhism and its rapid progress.

The impression that Buddhism teaches other-worldliness and a life of retirement and seclusion is also unfounded. The Buddha himself after his Enlightenment, *Bodhi,* engaged in an active public career. He travelled widely for fortyfive years, founded the *Sangha* or order of the Buddhist fraternity which included nuns also, visited many cities, towns and villages, meeting kings as well as commoners. Not only the Master but also his band of selfless preachers went from place to place spreading his doctrine.

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The Buddha also introduced what we may call in modern parlance guided democracy' in the Sangha. All official business in the formal meetings of the Sangha was transacted according to democratic methods. Every member had a vote and the decision of the Sangha was taken by a vote of the members of the Sangha. Not only during his lifetime did the Buddha manage the Sangha in a democratic spirit, but even after his death he did not want to restrict the freedom of the Sangha by appointing his heir. He declared before his *mahaparinirvana* or great decease that the *Dhamma* or doctrine and the *Vinaya* or code of conduct would lead the Sangha after him.

To encourage the virtues of detachment and non-possession, Buddhist monks were not allowed to own personal or private property. All furniture and other articles for the use of monks belonged to the Sangha. Thus vested interests were discouraged. Monasteries or *viharas* became centres for the spread of Buddhist culture, some of them finally developing into excellent centres of education like Nalanda and Takshashila, Vikramshila and Odantapuri. They attracted students from abroad, as is testified from the accounts of Chinese travellers like Fa-hien, I-tsing and Yuan Chwang, who visited India for pilgrimage to Buddhist places.

The message of the Buddha not only changed the course of Indian history but it also influenced tremendously our neighbouring countries. Maurice Winternitz has remarked that it is only with Buddhist literature that we gradually emerge into the broad daylight of history. A great part of Buddhist literature belongs to universal literature.

The legend of the Buddha even today preserves its ever-youthful freshness and vitality. It has inspired poets, writers, intellectuals and even the common man. His life has been the theme of various epics and dramas and many a poet has drawn inspiration from it. Edwin Arnold's classic epic, *The Light of Asia,* saw more than one hundred and fifty editions in the West.

THE BUDDHA

The Buddha was born around 563 B.C., although there is some controversy about the exact date. His father's name was Shuddhodana and his mother's Mahamaya. While Mahamaya was travelling to her parents' home, she gave birth to the child in the Lumbini grove between two sal trees which were then in full bloom. Emperor Ashoka visited the birth-place of the Buddha, in Lumbini, in Nepal Terai, and commemorated it by erecting a pillar with the inscription: Here the Buddha was born. The UNESCO is now developing Lumbini into a great international pilgrimage centre. The child was given the name 'Siddhartha', and his family name was Gautama. All accounts agree that Gautama left home when he was 29, attained Enlightenment or Bodhi under the Bodhi or Pipal tree in Bodh Gaya when he was 35, and passed away at the age of 80.

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Unfortunately, there is no connected biography of Gautama Buddha in the texts, much less in the modern sense of the term. Nor is it to be found in the biographical accounts which we get in the scriptures written immediately after his passing away. Buddhist texts — as is the case with the early ancient Indian texts of other religions also — were handed down orally. Some later texts furnish biographical details in which history and legend are interwoven.

According to textual tradition, the boy Siddhartha led a life of comfort and luxury. At sixteen he won in a contest his wife named Yashodhara. He had a son named Rahul. Buddhist texts inform us that from his earliest childhood Gautama was of a meditative nature. He was never satisfied with physical comforts and sensuous pleasures and used to sit in meditational postures for long spells even at an early age.

The Buddha story tells us how in spite of his father's efforts — in view of the prophecy that the boy will be either a *chakravarti,* great king, or a great ascetic — to keep all knowledge of worldly woes from him, the young prince once went with a charioteer for an excursion from his palace and saw an old man, a sick man and a dead body, in succession. At the sight of each spectacle, he asked his charioteer the meaning of the sight he had witnessed for the first time in his life. 'This happens to all men,' said the charioteer, and the prince was plunged in deep thought over the answer. His mind was troubled to know that sickness, old age and death are inherent in the very existence.

Afterwards the prince saw a *shramana* or recluse with shaven head and tattered yellow robe. 'What man is this?' the prince asked, and was told by his driver that it was one who had gone forth into homeless life. The conversation with the charioteer had a tremendous effect on the mind of the young man, and brought about a sea-change in his outlook on life.

Then follows in the scriptures the most touching description of Gautama's great renunciation. He returned to the palace, deeply pondering over what he had seen and the answers that the charioteer had given to his questions. He made up his mind to leave home in search of the abode where there was no birth, no death, no sickness, no sorrow. One night when he saw female musicians lying asleep in unbecoming postures in his palace, his mind revolted at the very sight and he cultivated dispassion for sensual pleasures. And an overwhelming feeling of renunciation of worldly pleasures and compassion for the sufferings of people arose in him.

Siddhartha went to the chamber of his charming wife, Yashodhara, who was fast asleep with her hand on son Rahul's head, and bade farewell to his wife and loving child. At the dead of night, he took Channa, his charioteer, and Kanthaka, his horse, and left the palace in search of immortality. He discarded his royal robes and wore those of a monk. He cut his long hair with his sword and became an ascetic.

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The prince was determined to find an answer to illness and suffering in this world and the cause of rebirth. He went to Alara Kalama, a reputed sage of the time who had mastered the practice of meditation. Gautama lived with him but he found no answer to the problem of suffering. Then he approached another meditation master, and equally famous Uddaka Ramaputta — but his problem remained unsolved.

Then, for six years Gautama meditated alone, without any guide, practising the severest physical austerities and undergoing different kinds of self-torture until he became extremely weak and shorn of all physical strength. It was, however, Gautama's mental powers that sustained his body. He conquered fear, subdued all lusts of the flesh, fully controlled his mind, but still enlightenment eluded him. Gautama had enjoyed the richest life of sensuous pleasures. Now he saw the other extreme in experimenting with the severest self-mortification in his austerities. But truth was yet far away.

He now realised that both the extremes led one nowhere. He decided to eat and sleep in moderation. During his penances, there were five ascetics with him, his colleagues, who were likewise in search of truth. They now abandoned him in disgust, thinking that Gautama was going back to a life of abundance and luxury.

One day Gautama accepted a bowl of milk-pudding offered by Sujata, a rich man's daughter, and, having eaten and bathed, he sat cross-legged under the Pipal tree, later known as the *Bodhi* tree, determined to enter perfect enlightenment *sammasambodhi* or perish. He said, 'Let my skin, my nerves and my bones waste away, let my blood dry up, I will not leave this posture until I have gained perfect Enlightenment.' Mara, the greatest tempter, the god of evil, tried to entice him and dissuade him from his path by creating violent scenes. With all the power at his command, Mara tried to frighten the *bodhisattva,* as Buddha was known before his Buddhahood, but he remained firm in his resolve.

It was on the night of the full moon of Vaishakha that Gautama attained Enlightenment or *Bodhi* and thenceforward was called 'Bhagavan Buddha'. According to the textual accounts of the 'Enlightenment', during the process of its attainment, in the first watch of the night, Gautama discovered the 'Law of Dependent Origination' *paticcasamuppada,* a cycle of twelve causes and effects that conditioned the world. This law is the special contribution of the Buddha, never expounded by any other sage or philosopher hitherto.

Then the Buddha went to Varanasi, the ancient seat of learning, to preach his new doctrine to the five ascetics who had left him in despair during his austerities. On the night of the full moon, he preached to them the 'Middle Path' of avoiding the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, and also the Four Noble Truths, which constitute the fundamental doctrine of Buddhism. This includes the Noble Eightfold

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Path, which is also called the 'Middle Path'. Initially, the five ascetics were hesitant to welcome Gautama, but the charismatic personality of the Buddha, who had recently gained the fruits of enlightenment, had a magic effect and they were converted to Gautama's views and were ordained. Thus was laid the foundation of the Buddhist Sangha. The first sermon of the Buddha to the five monks is called *Dharmachakra-pravartana* or Setting in motion the Wheel of Righteousness.

Then commenced Gautama's preaching career which lasted about forty-five years during which he met all classes of people, high and low, including even courtesans like Amrapali; and whosoever came across the Master was converted. Some became lay disciples or *upasakas* and the others monks or bhikkhus, members of the Sangha.

The Buddha entered into *mahaparinirvana* at the age of eighty. He was born between two sal trees and also died in the same place. Just before his death, he lay down in a lion's posture or *sinha-shayya* and gave his last instructions to thousands of monks and laymen who had assembled to have a last glimpse of him. His last memorable words were: 'Transient are all conditioned things. Strive after your own salvation diligently.'

The Buddha's remains were cremated with royal honours. The death occurred on the full moon day of Vaishakha, April-May, as did his birth and enlightenment. The Vaishakha Purnima is, therefore, celebrated by the Buddhists as a thrice-sacred day.

The Buddha was given the appellation 'Bhagavan'. As there is no conception of 'God' in Buddhism, this word does not mean 'God' but one who is blessed with all power, splendour, fame, wealth and knowledge. It is the most reverential term used by the believers, and there are three meanings current in English of Bhagavan, viz., 'Lord', 'Blessed One', 'Exalted One'.

Also after his enlightenment, the Buddha referred to himself as *Tathagata* or 'Thus come' or 'Thus gone', like the previous Buddhas. There are various meanings of this word in the Buddhist commentaries.

It may be pointed out that in early Buddhism the Buddha is depicted more as a human being than as a superman or omnipotent deity. In his advanced age, the Buddha complains of backache. The texts speak of Gautama as handsome, pleasant to look at, inspiring trust, gifted with great beauty of complexion, stately to behold, etc. The deification process began some years after his passing, especially with the rise of the *Mahasanghika* sect.

The Buddha was a teacher or *shasta, par excellence,* self-confident, fluent in his speech, lucid in expression, liberal and compassionate, always instructing his disciples how to lead a virtuous life and be helpful to fellow-beings. It is reported in the texts that once a bhikkhu was sick unto death with acute dysentery and was lying in a pitiable condition. His fellow-

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monks neglected him as useless to the Sangha, but the Buddha saw his condition and asked the Venerable Ananda, his principal disciple and personal assistant, to fetch some water. Ananda brought the water. The Blessed One poured the water over the bhikkhu and the Venerable Ananda wiped him down. Then the Blessed One taking hold of that bhikkhu at the head and Ananda at the feet, together lifted him up and laid him on the bhikkhu's bed. The Buddha personally served the sick monk with the help of Ananda and set an example to other monks. He told them: 'Monks, you have no mother and father here who might wait upon you. If you do not wait upon one another, who will wait upon you? Therefore, monks, he who would wait upon me, let him wait upon the sick.' Such examples of the Buddha's compassion are many.

The Buddha withheld nothing from what he had gained in his Enlightenment. His life was an open book. He had no closed fist of a teacher or *acharya-mushti*. He never reserved some knowledge for some chosen disciples. As the texts inform us, after initial hesitation whether his new doctrine will be understood or not, he was finally convinced that his message had a relevance and therefore declared: 'Open ye your ears, deliverance from death is found here and now.'

In the recorded dialogues, the Buddha emerges as a first-rate teacher who uses similes and parables to convince his questioner instead of presenting his doctrine in a dry way. In one of the Pali *suttas* or parables, the Buddha gives a simile of a man hit by a poisoned arrow and, instead of having the arrow drawn from his wound immediately, is interested in useless questions about the description of the arrow and its shooter. In the same way is the discussion of unnecessary, metaphysical questions which are purely speculative, such as whether the universe is eternal or non-eternal, or whether the Tathagata or Buddha lives after his death. What we should be interested in is the removal of suffering or *dukkha* which is the major problem.

The Buddha discouraged superstition and blind faith. He taught that no one should believe simply because it is spoken by some sage, written in some sacred book or has been handed down by some tradition unless it is conducive to happiness and peace by personal experience. According to the Buddha, the wise see life in the correct perspective or *yathabhutam* and see it as a whole. He also believed in self-examination, which Ashoka also emphasised in his edicts. The Buddha's attitude was that of a modern scientist. Let all things be examined dispassionately, objectively, assuming nothing, testing everything. He exhorted his followers to examine his words and not to believe them out of only deference to him. Socrates also had said that an unexamined life was not worth living.

SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

After the passing away of the Buddha, a schism developed in the Buddhist Sangha. Now that the Master was no more, there was reversal

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of his teaching and doctrinal differences began to grow. Various Buddhist councils were held to determine the meanings of the words of the Master and by the time of the third Buddhist council at the time of Ashoka, we are told, as many as eighteen schools had been formed. Differences and controversies that arose among the Buddhist sects showed the dynamism of Buddhist ideas that were influencing the thought currents of the time. Buddhism looked ahead, advanced and crossed the frontiers of India and conquered new lands without a single weapon but with its sublime message of love, compassion and wisdom.

Buddhist population in India is estimated at about thirty million. The concentration of Buddhists is to be found in Maharashtra where the founder of the neo-Buddhist movement and architect of the Indian constitution, the late Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, was converted to Buddhism at a special ceremony with a large number of his followers from the so-called 'untouchables' in 1956. Thus, the oppressed and downtrodden of the past centuries found in Buddhism a new means of advancement and psychological liberation. The neo-Buddhist movement has spread to other parts of the country and small pockets of Buddhist population can be found in U.P., M.P., Punjab, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, etc. Buddhists in India generally follow the tenets of Theravada Buddhism but the Buddhist followers in the Himalayan region, namely, Ladakh, Sikkim, Lahul-Spiti, Darjeeling and parts of Assam are mostly Mahayanists.

The Himalayan Buddhists of Ladakh, Sikkim, etc., are adherents of Buddhism which we may call 'Tibetan Buddhism' which is basically a part of the Mahayana complex, although there is a shift of emphasis on certain aspects of Mahayana, e.g., tantra and occultism, esoterism, etc. In fact, it is from Tibet that Buddhism was introduced into Ladakh and Sikkim, although it is ironical that these parts of India should receive the religion not directly from outside. But history has its quirks. However, it is believed by some scholars that in the earliest stages the credit for introducing Buddhism in the Himalayan region may be ascribed to the missionaries sent out by Ashoka.

Like Tibet, in Ladakh and Sikkim also, there is a strong feeling for religion and the population is intensely religious. People are simple and honest and have great faith in the lamas. There are numerous monasteries and stupas in Ladakh and Sikkim and one can find the traditional sects of Tibetan Buddhism, namely, Kargud, Galuk, Niyma and Sakya.

The exile of Dalai Lama and Tibetan refugees after the Chinese occupation of Tibet has been a blessing in disguise for the people of the Himalayan region in that the presence of Tibetan scholars has given a stimulus to studies in the Tibetan pattern of Buddhism and thus enriched the cultural and religious life of the entire Himalayan region. In fact, Indian Buddhism has become rich with the availability of Tibetan scholarship and Buddhist Himalayas on our side still richer with the treasures of Buddhist texts brought by Tibetans recently into our country.

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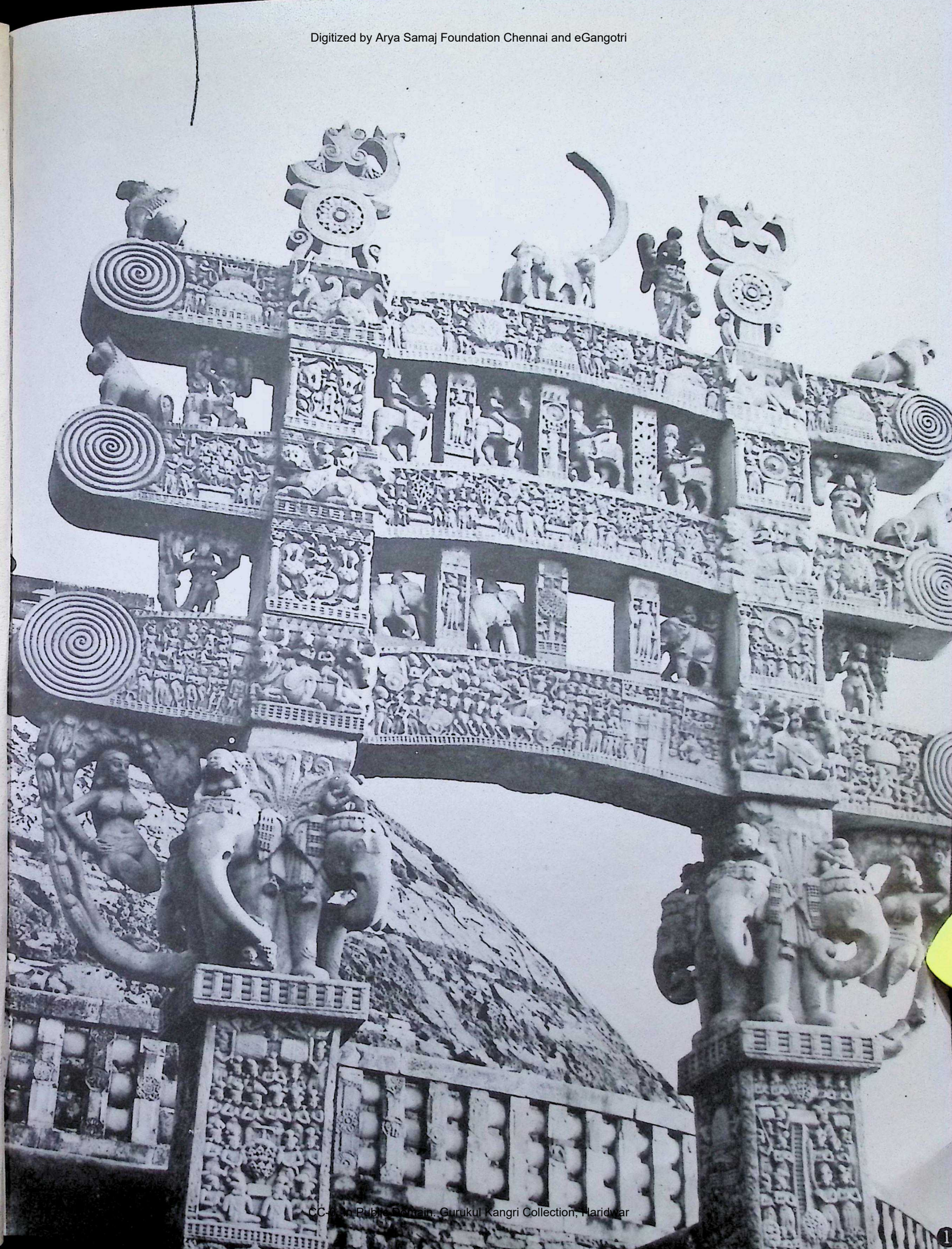

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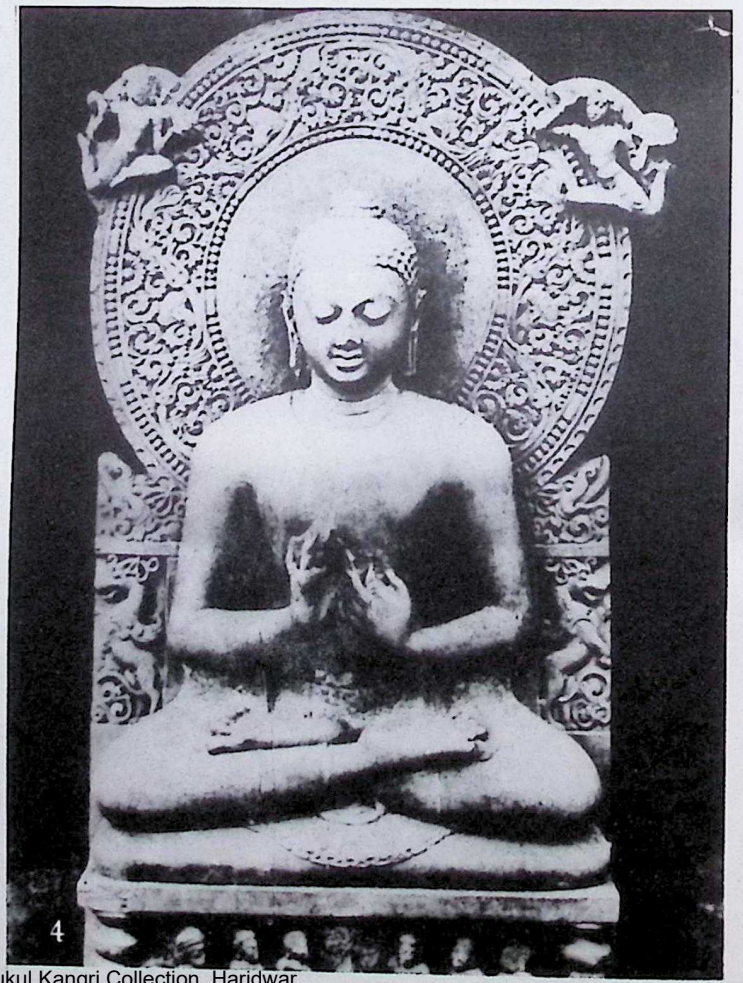
1. "Wide open is the door to immortality for all who have ears to hear." *(Vinaya Pitaka, 1.10).* The North Gate of the Great Stupa of Ranchi built by Emperor Ashok in the 3rd century B.C.

2. The Dream of Queen Maya, Gautama Buddha's mother, Bharhut. The sculpture shows the descent of a white elephant into her womb to signify the birth of a future Buddha.

3. "Because I ate so little, my limbs became like the joints of withered creepers . . . the pupils of my eyes appeared lying low and deep." *(Majjhima-nikaya, 1.303).* A Gandhara statue of Buddha showing him practising austerities.

4. "The two extremes . . . one ought to avoid . . . self-indulgence . . . and self-mortification." *(Vinaya Pitaka, 1.13).* A Sarnath statue of Buddha preaching to his first five disciples after his Enlightenment.

5. Buddha's life in epitome, Sarnath. The scenes represented here are—the birth of Buddha under a *sal* tree, Mara's attack and Bodhisattva's Enlightenment; the first sermon; and the *mahapari-nirvana.* The Buddha figures at the sides, shown seated and standing on lotuses, represent the great miracle of Shravasti.



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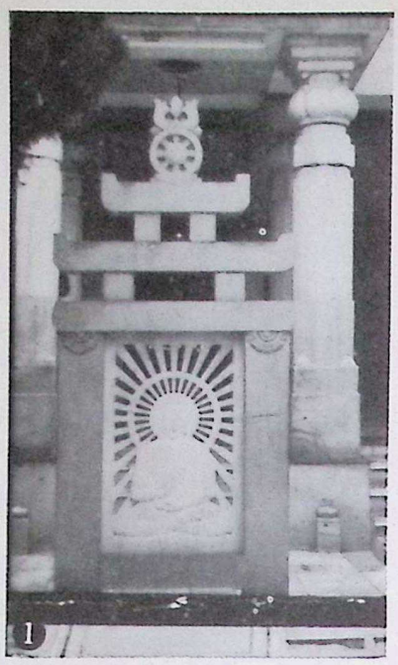
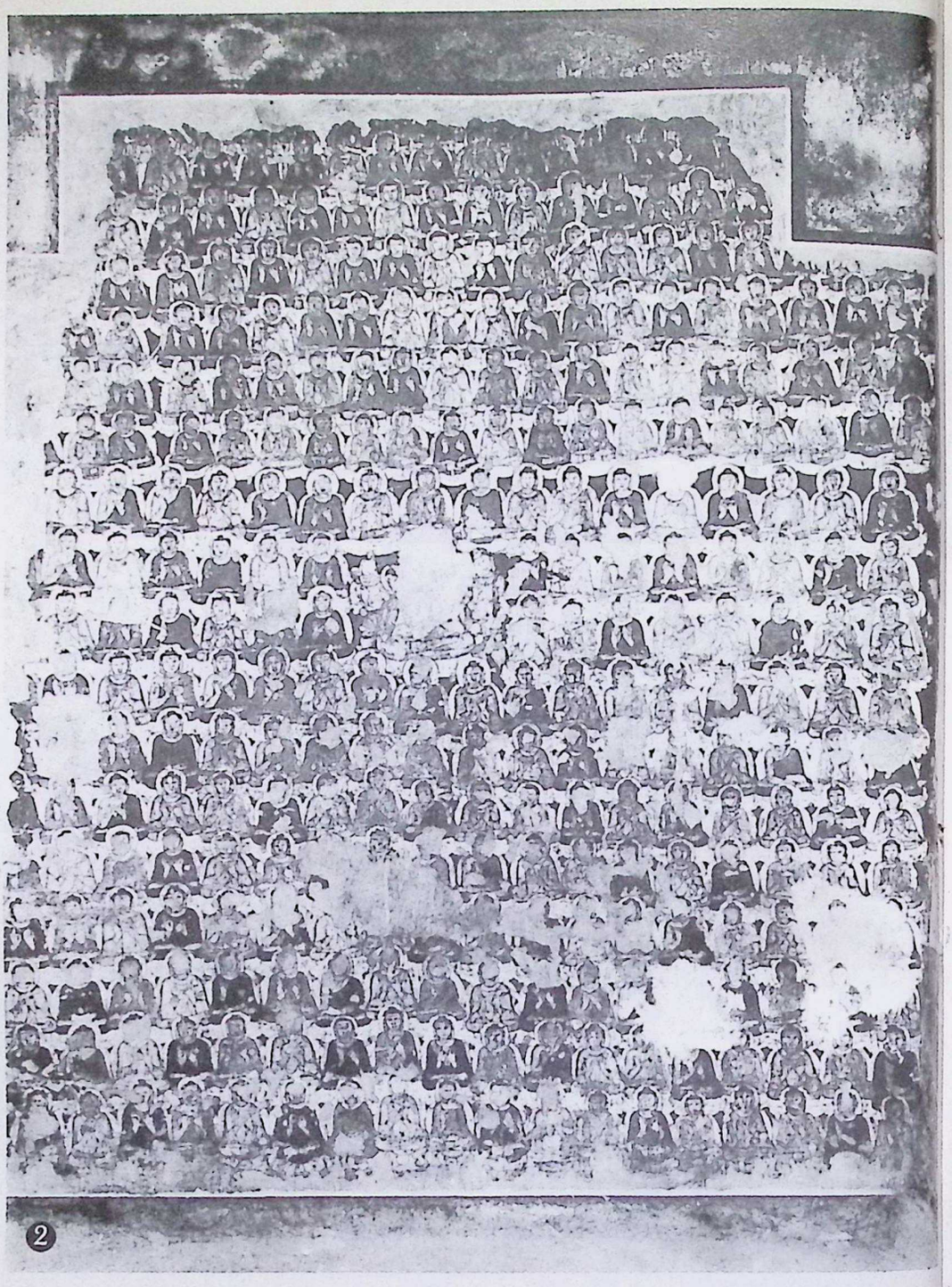


1. The entrance to a Buddhist temple. The wheel signifies the proclamation of the kingdom of dharma.

2. An Ajanta cave wall painting showing seated Buddhas.

3. The main stupa at Sanchi.



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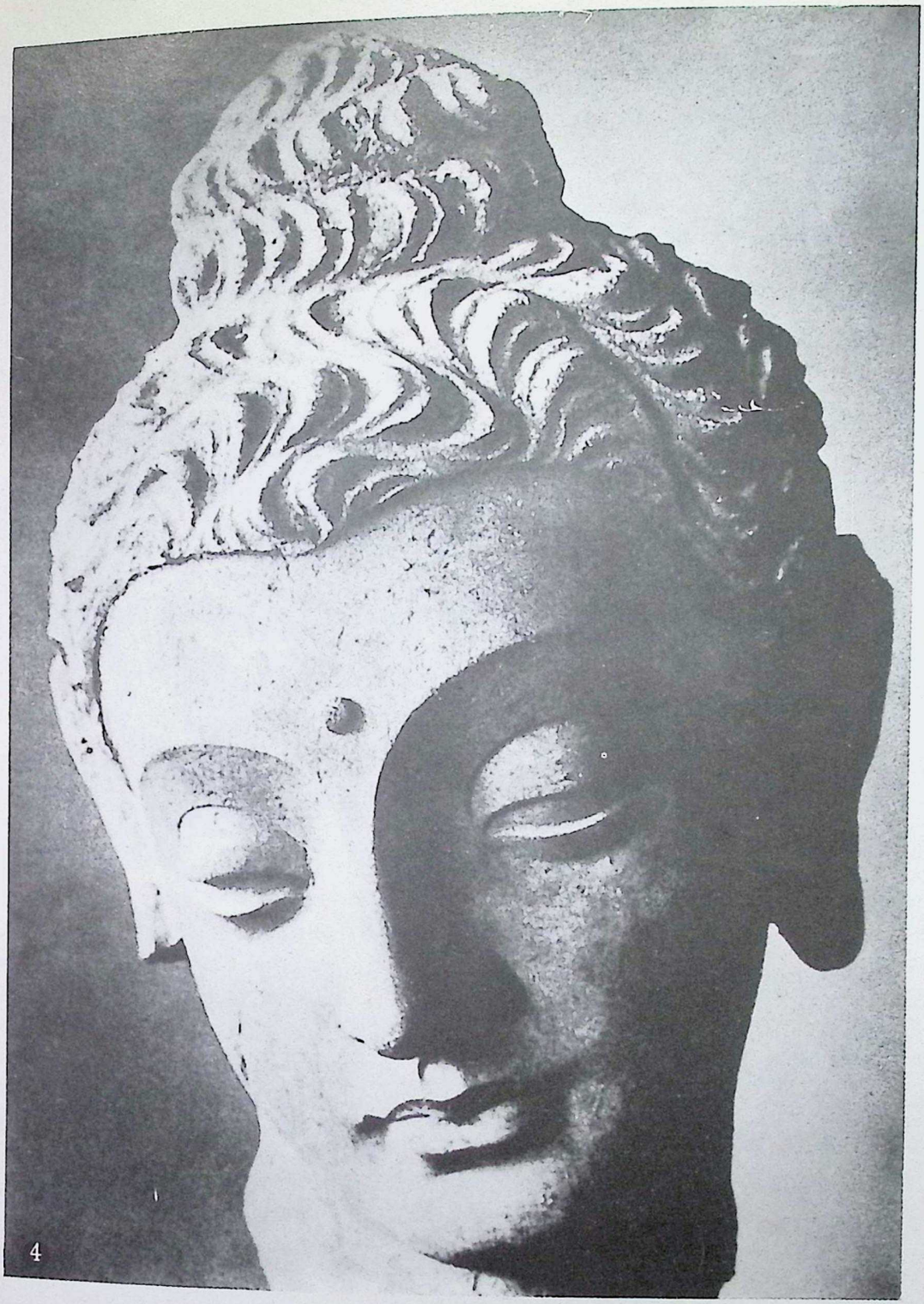

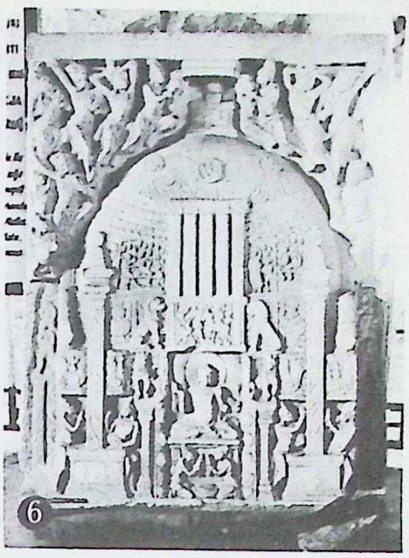

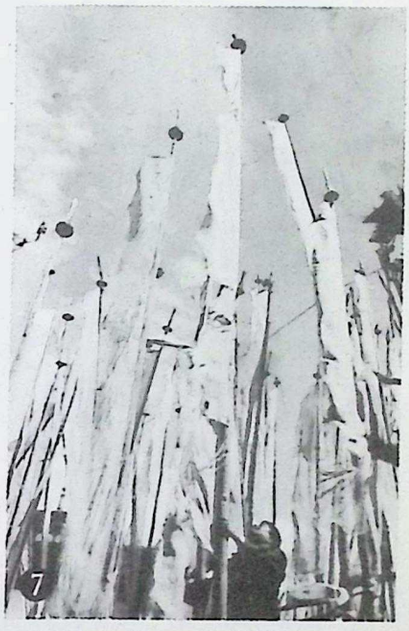

4. "One should develop loving kindness for the entire world." *(Mettasutta)*. A Gandhara head of Lord Buddha.

5. The Chetiyagiri Vihara at Sanchi.

6. A stupa slate from Nagarjunakonda.

7. Buddhist prayer flags in Ladakh.

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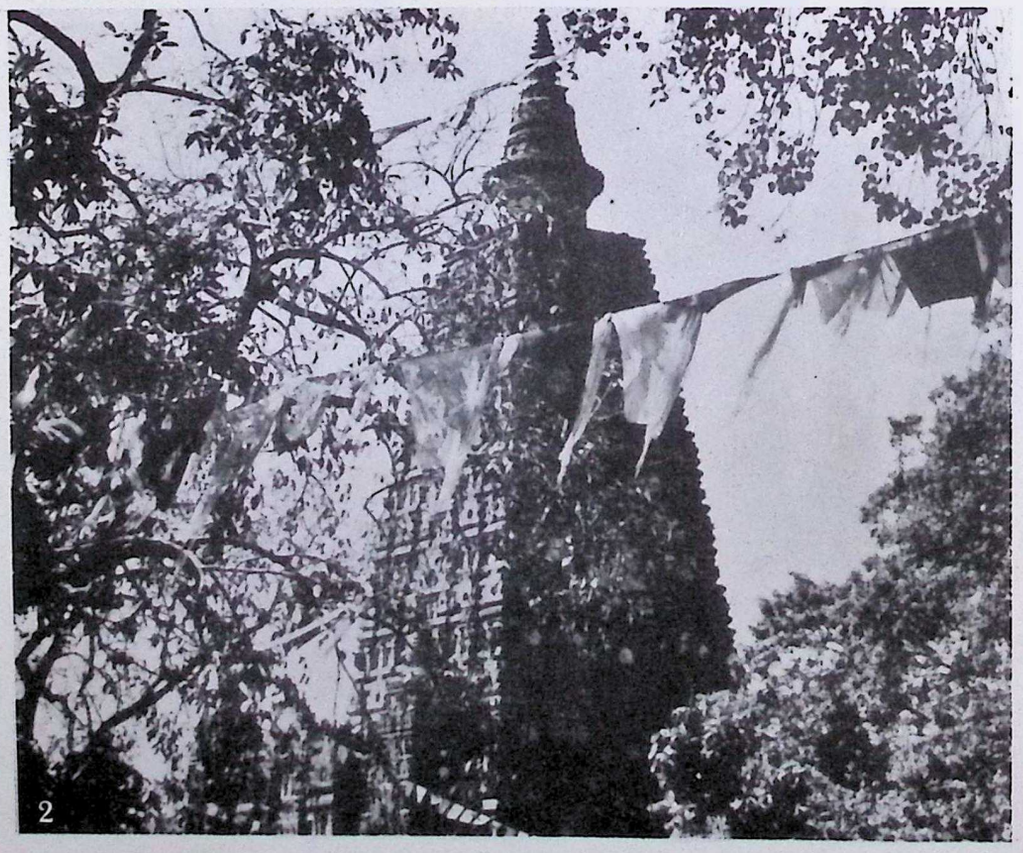
1. An Amaravati sculpture showing the miracle of Nalagiri. At Rajgir a mad elephant was let loose by Devadatta out of jealousy, but later on knelt at the feet of the Buddha.

2. The main temple at Bodhgaya, where Buddha attained Enlightenment.



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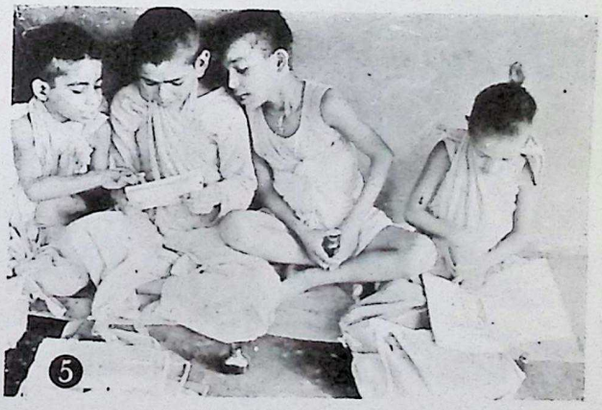

3. A Buddhist lay devotee with his prayer-wheel in Ladakh.

4. The Buddhist mantra—om mani padme hum (hail to the jewel in the lotus) is a popular mantra among Tibetan Buddhists, majority of whom are now settled in India.

5. Young Buddhists studying scriptures.

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1. Worship at the Buddhist temple in Delhi during the Buddha Jayanti festival. The image is modelled after the one at Sarnath. Offerings of candles and incense are made.

2. Lamas are simulating sutras by blowing the trumpets, according to Tibetan traditions.

3. Kaza festival in Ladakh.

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Theravada Buddhism also spread to Burma, Ceylon, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and its Mahayana form to China, Japan, Vietnam and Mongolia. Wherever Buddhism permeated, it assimilated local rites and customs. In Tibetan Buddhism along with the old doctrines, one finds magic and tantric cults also assimilated. Japan developed its 'Pure Land' Buddhism of salvation and grace and also 'Zen Buddhism' which believes that enlightenment comes instantly and directly into the heart of man.

Sri Lanka received Buddhism through Ashoka's son Mahindra and daughter Sanghamitra in the 3rd century B.C., while it was introduced into China in the first century A.D. when the Emperor Min ti invited two Indian monks to China to translate Indian Buddhist works. It was introduced into Burma in the same century. Japan received it in the 6th century A.D. through Korea. In Thailand, emulating the example of Ashoka's religious fervour and association with the Sangha, King Li-Tai (*c.* 1400 A.D.) entered the Sangha for a brief period and thus commenced a close association between the royal house and the Sangha of Thailand. Till today both the royalty and the Sangha are highly venerated in Thailand. Thus, the Buddha's message spread in a large part of Asia and Buddhism is today one of the major religions of the world.

Patron Kings

The most important royal patrons of Buddhism whose names are often mentioned in early Buddhist literature, besides the Great Ashoka, are Bimbisara, Ajatashatru and Prasenajit, who are known to have visited Buddha and held conversation with him during his life-time. Bimbisara was the first convert to Buddhism and celebrated his conversion by serving the Buddha with meals personally with his own hands and donating the Veluvana Park. Buddha's relations with the kings had been very cordial. The Pali texts inform us that kings used to meet him and seek his instructions not only on dhamma but also on problems of state and for the welfare of their subjects.

In the later Buddhist literature, the kings whose contribution to the development and expansion of Buddhism cannot be forgotten are Menander (Pali Milinda), Kanishka and Harsha. Later on the rulers of the Pala dynasty (*circa* 750-1150 A.D.) also contributed much by building up viharas and big educational monasteries like Nalanda, Vikramashila and Odantapuri. However, it was Ashoka who made Buddhism an international religion by sending his missionaries outside India.

Buddhist Councils

The Buddhist Councils have played a great role in the development of Buddhism. Although many Buddhist Councils were held in the long history of Buddhism in India and abroad, only four Councils are more important from the historical and doctrinal points of view.

The first Buddhist Council was held immediately after the parinirvana of the Buddha at Rajagriha to recite the dharma or doctrine and the *vinaya*

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or disciple taught by the Buddha. It was held under the chairmanship of Mahakassapa in which Upali, a senior monk, expert in Vinaya rules, recited the Vinaya, and Ananda, the constant disciple to Gautama Buddha, recited the dharma or sutras. The Pali texts give many detailed accounts of Ananda's association with the Buddha and even his attachment to him. He literally weeps when he hears that the Buddha will soon enter into parinirvana.

The first Council was necessitated by the remarks of an unruly monk named Subhadra who rejoiced at the passing away of the Buddha and said that now that the Master was no more, monks would be free from the restraints that the Buddha constantly imposed on them. These remarks sent shock waves to the disciplined community and fortified their determination to preserve the purity of the doctrine of the Buddha. King Ajatashatru patronised and helped in the erection of the pandal for the Council. It achieved the main purpose of settlement of texts on vinaya and dhamma.

The second Council was held at Vaishali, a century after the passing away of the Buddha. It is recorded that some monks of the Vajji were practising ten indulgences which went against the basic Vinaya rules as enunciated by the Buddha. This necessitated the convening of the second Council to decide the issue. The ten points of indulgence of Vajjian monks were declared illegal. The Vajjians, however, refused to abide by the decision of the majority and were expelled from the Sangha. With the expulsion of the Vajjians, the Council came to an abrupt close and the solidarity of the Sangha was threatened. It is mentioned in the Buddhist texts that the monks who did not subscribe to the orthodox views of the Council convened another Council in which ten thousand monks participated. This was called *Mahasangiti* or great congregation and those who participated in it were called 'Mahasanghikas' distinguished from the orthodox members of the Sangha who were called 'Theravadins' or preservers of the ancient doctrine. Some scholars are of the view that this first schism was followed by a series of dissensions in the Buddhist Sangha which led ultimately to the formation of the eighteen Buddhist sects.

The third Buddhist Council, which was held at Pataliputra or modern Patna under the patronage of Ashoka, was held owing to the rise of different sects who were allegedly misinterpreting the teachings of the Buddha and indulging in wrong practices. There is no mention of this Council in the Sanskrit Buddhist accounts. It is only the Pali accounts which furnish information in this regard.

Mogaliputta Tissa, who is reputed to have converted Ashoka to Buddhism, was the Chairman of this Council. Tissa who is credited with the authorship of the famous book of the Abhidharma, namely, *Kathavatthu,* Points of Controversy, was able to subdue heresies and expelled the dissenters from the Sangha. The important contribution of the third Council was that the true faith was restored and purity of the doctrine established.

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Another achievement of the Council was the despatch of missionaries abroad for the propagation of the true doctrine of *Saddhamma*. The credit for Buddhism having become an important religion in many countries of Asia goes to this Council.

No account of the fourth Council is found in Theravada tradition. This Council was held under the auspices of Kanishka, the great Kushana king. He was instrumental in the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia. It was in 100 A.D. that the fourth Council was held in Kashmira or in Jullundur, according to some scholars under the inspiration of this great king. The main object of the Council was to reconcile the dissensions in the Sangha. As already stated above, 18 sects were formed. Yuan Chwang, the celebrated Chinese traveller,informs us that King Kanishka was so interested in the Buddhist doctrine that he sent for a monk every day to give him instruction but he found the instruction different and often even contradictory. He was confused and consulted Venerable Parshva about the true doctrine and on his advice decided to convoke a Council in which various sects would be represented. The king built a monastery for 500 monks to participate in the Council.

The main achievement of this Council was the compilation of commentaries or *Vibhasas* on the *Tripitaka.* It is said that the monks of the Sarvastivada School predominated at the Council. This school compiled the texts in Sanskrit; and the Abhidharma and commentaries received more prominence in this Council. We cannot say that Mahayana was represented in this Council but it cannot be denied that the Mahayana was gradually emerging through the various schools.

THE DOCTRINES

Three Marks: The fundamental teaching of the Buddha is that everything is impermanent or *anicca,* substanceless or *anatta* and full of suffering or *dukkha.* These are called the three marks or *lakkhanas* of existence. These three were further extended — and quite logically — to the mark of *shunya* or void, which later became the fundamental doctrine of one of the most important schools of Buddhism named Madhyamika, the school founded by the great Acharya Nagarjuna.

Buddhism is explained briefly in the well-known and oft-quoted statement, 'Whatever is born is subject to destruction.' The texts of early Buddhism repeatedly tell us that a disciple attains an insight into the Dhamma when he realises this fact. In fact, everything is transient and changing, but it is because of our attachment born of ignorance that we fail to see the truth and continue to live in our make-believe world and think that things are eternal. Origination and cessation, construction and destruction, these two factors are never at rest. According to Buddhism, there is no 'being', there is only 'becoming'. The universe is in a state of constant flux. According to the Buddha, the world is a wheel of becoming or *bhavachakra* which goes on and on. Nobody knows the beginning or the end of the world, *samsara,* that which moves on.

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The principle of impermanence logically leads to the theory of substancelessness or absence of any permanent 'self', 'soul' or 'ego' or *atman.* There are various theories about the permanence of soul in other religions. Buddhism recognises no such entity and in this it stands unique in the history of human thought.

In the Buddha's view, this conception of soul, self, ego or I-ness is illusion born of ignorance or *avijja*. What, then, is 'man'? The Buddha answers that a being is composed of states of mind and matter which are always in flux. In the *Milinda-Panha,* the venerable Nagasena answers this question of King Milinda (Menander). He gives an example of a chariot. There is no central essence in a chariot. It is composed of yokes, spokes, framework, etc. Apart from these parts, there is no 'chariot' as such. Even so, a 'man' exists in and is composed of states of mind and matter. And these five states of being are: (1) *Rupa* or matter, (2) *Vedana* or sensations of pleasure, pain and indifference, (3) *Samjna* or cognition, (4) *Samskara* or synthetic mental states, or *karma*-formations and (5) *Vijnana* or consciousness.

The Four Noble Truths

After the Enlightenment, in his first sermon at Sarnath, the Buddha propounded the four Noble Truths: (1) The Noble Truth of Suffering; (2) The Noble Truth of Arising or *Samudaya* of the Suffering, craving or *Tanha;* (3) The Noble Truth of cessation or *Nirodha* of Suffering, or *Nibbana;* (4) The Noble Truth of the Path or *Magga* leading to the cessation of Suffering, the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Truth of Suffering

As stated above, suffering is inherent in the very nature of things. It is omnipresent. Birth is suffering and similarly old age, disease, death, association with the unpleasant and separation from the loved one is suffering. Not getting what one desires, grief, lamentations, distress is suffering. In brief, all the five aggregates or *khandhas* are suffering. Thus suffering is the fact, the truth of life. It is the realistic view of life. It is not pessimism, as some would call it. For, the Buddha does not stop at proclaiming suffering but he has also shown the way to get out of it. Pessimists believe that the world is full of misery and there is no way out of it. The Buddha admitted that there are different forms of happiness but they are all impermanent, full of suffering and subject to change. We have our own experience that even the best enjoyments of life are transitory, fleeting and never lead to lasting or true satisfaction. Therefore, the Buddha is realistic and objective when he says, 'Everything is dukkha.'

The Noble Truth of Arising of Suffering: Craving (Tanha)

According to the Buddha, the cause of suffering is not the wrath of gods or God or due to the arbitrary will of unknown powers above us. The cause of suffering is our craving which, as the texts explain, leads to re-

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birth again and again and, is accompanied by lust, which seeks pleasure. Craving is never satisfied and manifests itself in various ways. The craving includes not only hankering after sense-pleasures, power, wealth, position but also attachment to ideas, views, opinions, theories and beliefs. All the trouble, according to the Buddha, arises out of selfish desires which are never satisfied. In fact, there is no end to them. And clinging to these different cravings and seeking to satisfy them brings temporary successes and failures, hopes and disappointments, but never satisfaction itself. Therefore, if one wants to get rid of suffering, one must give up all kinds of craving.

The Noble Truth of Cessation of Suffering or Nirvana

The Buddha does not teach only suffering but shows the path to remove suffering. To eliminate suffering, one must eliminate its cause — desire, craving, thirst, whatever you call it, and nirvana is nothing but extinction of craving. The state of desirelessness, of absence of craving is nirvana, here and now. It is difficult to define nirvana, the most important term and also the final aim in Buddhism. Its nature can never be defined in words, although we do find various descriptions; for example, it is a placid state of mind, place of liberation, end of suffering, supreme joy, state of unshakable emancipation of mind, unconditioned state, tranquillity supreme, ambrosia, the end of birth and death, etc.

The ideal of Theravada Buddhism is nirvana and that of Mahayana is bodhi. Nirvana is mainly explained in two ways: (a) blowing out of the flame of desire or extinguishing of fire or *raga* or lust, *dosa* or *dvesha* or malevolence and *moha* or delusion. In the older texts, a simile of wind blowing out the flame is given. Buddhaghosa, the celebrated Pali commentator, derives the term from *nir+vana*, a state without the jungle or *vana* or craving or tanha, i.e., the place in which the jungle of craving has been completely cleared, a state of quiescence of all cravings.

Bodhi literally means 'awakening', in extended connotation, it is 'enlightenment', 'knowledge possessed by a buddha'. One who has obtained bodhi is a 'buddha'. Bodhi is also found in early texts as a synonym for nirvana. Nirvana is sometimes interchangeably used for bodhi in later Buddhism (Mahayana). Generally, however, nirvana is used to describe the state of arhathood and bodhi the state of Buddhahood. Arhats realise nirvana and buddhas attain bodhi.

The Noble Truth of Way to the Cessation of Suffering: The Eightfold Path

The Buddha has shown us the path of the removal of suffering. It is the Noble Eightfold Path or *Ariya-Atthangika Magga* or *Arya-Ashtangika Marga.* The Eightfold Path is acknowledged as an excellent course of spiritual training, and has eight constituents or *angas:*

Right Understanding or *Samma ditthi*
Right Thought or *Samma samkappa*

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Right Speech or *Samma vaca*
Right Action or *Samma kammanta*
Right Livelihood or *Samma ajiva*
Right Effort or *Samma vayama*
Right Mindfulness or *Samma sati*
Right Concentration or *Samma samadhi*

Right Understanding consists in understanding the four Noble Truths. It is understanding of things in their true nature or *yathabhuta.* This is possible when the mind is free from all obsessions and impurities or *asavas* through ethical conduct and mental culture.

Right Thought means the thought of renunciation, of detachment, of compassion and love, of non-harming and non-violence.

Right Speech is abstention from falsehood, backbiting, slander, harsh, impolite and malicious speech, idle talk and gossip.

Right Action is refraining from killing, sexual misconduct. It aims at promoting the moral, honourable and peaceful conduct of a person.

Right Livelihood consists in refraining from earning one's living in a manner which brings harm to others, for example, trading in weapons, in living beings, in flesh and intoxicants, cheating in trade, selling poisonous articles, etc.

Right Effort is of four kinds: (a) preventing evil thoughts that have not yet arisen; (b) getting rid of such evil thoughts that have already arisen; (c) producing and cultivating good and wholesome thoughts that have not yet arisen; (d) conserving and bringing to perfection good and wholesome thoughts that have already arisen. This, in Buddhism, is the right mental exercise.

Right Mindfulness means becoming constantly aware and mindful of activities of body, sensations, mental states and ideas or cognitive processes, thoughts, etc. By right mindfulness man gains self-control and becomes self-possessed. It aims at self-mastery.

Right Concentration is the practice of the four *dhyanas* (Pali *jhana*) or meditative absorption. It may be pointed out that it is difficult to translate 'dhyana', therefore the Chinese transliterated the word into 'Ch'an' and the Japanese into 'Zen'.

In the first dhyana, there arises detachment from sensual objects and unwholesome states of mind. It is accompanied by initial application of mind or *vitakka* and sustained thought or *vichara,* rapture or *piti* and joy or *sukha* born of detachment.

In the second dhyana, all diverse mental activities are suppressed, inner tranquillity and one-pointedness of mind are developed and rapture and joy still continue.

In the third dhyana, the feeling of joy disappears but rapture continues.

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In the fourth dhyana, all sensations of happiness and unhappiness, joy and sorrow are no more, only pure equanimity or *upekkha* and awareness or *sati* remain. It should be noted that one-pointedness or *ekaggata* is a common factor in all the dhyanas. In fact, one-pointedness is the essence of a dhyana.

The Noble Eightfold Path is thus a practical way shown by the Buddha for a tensionless, tranquil and peaceful life. It is a self-discipline of body, word and mind. It is the path of self-purification. The essence of the Path has been put forth in one verse by the Buddha:

Abstinence from all evils,
fulfilment of all good,
purification of one's mind
this is the teaching of the Buddhas. **Dhammapada 183**

The Doctrine of Conditionality or Pratityasamutpada

The doctrine of conditionality, variously called 'Theory of Dependent Origination', 'Conditioned Genesis', 'Chain of Causation', is the special contribution of the Buddha and is the real foundation on which the philosophy of Buddhism is built. The central point of this teaching is that there is nothing in this world which is produced without any cause or condition. All the states of mind and matter are being conditionally produced by other states of mind and in turn they are conditionally produced by still others and thus the process, the wheel of becoming or bhava-chakra, moves on. The basic principle of this doctrine is given in a two-line formula:

When this is, that is.
When this is no more, that is no more.

Thus things are interdependent, relative and conditional. This whole doctrine is based on this formula. There are twelve constituents in this law of conditionality and are explained as follows:

(1) Conditioned by ignorance or avijja arise karma-formations or *samkhara.*

(2) Conditioned by karma-formations, arises consciousness or *vinnana.*

(3) Conditioned by consciousness arise mental and physical states or *namarupa.*

(4) Conditioned by mental and physical states arise six mental and physical faculties or *salayatana.*

(5) Conditioned by six mental and physical faculties arises contact or *phassa* with the object.

(6) Conditioned by contact with the object arises sensation or *vedana.*

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(7) Conditioned by sensation arises thirst or *tanha.*

(8) Conditioned by thirst arises grasping or *upadana.*

(9) Conditioned by grasping arises the process of becoming or *bhava.*

(10) Conditioned by the process of becoming arises birth or *jati.*

(11) Conditioned by birth arise

(12) decay, death or *jaramarana,* etc.

In all, there are twelve connecting factors or spokes in the wheel of becoming or bhavachakra. And in the reverse order, i.e., when 'ignorance' ceases, karma-formations cease, etc., we come to the cessation of the cycle of death and birth. This process is symbolically represented in some of the Buddhist paintings and symbols in the wheel with twelve spokes. It should be remembered that the twelve factors are each conditioned as well as conditioning. The conditional process goes on for ever till a man enters nirvana and is liberated. There is no conception of a first cause in Buddhism. Existence is to be viewed as a conditional process.

Theory of Karma

Buddhism, like the other Indian religions, viz., Hinduism and Jainism, believes in the doctrine of karma. But the Buddhists do not believe that the results of one's actions can be wiped out through grace or prayer, or that some omnipotent and omniscient deity rewards or punishes a man for his actions. Buddhism believes that karma is the law itself and that bad, *akushala,* actions will bring degenerating effects and good, *kushala,* actions will bring good results. Every volitional action produces its impressions, and these impressions determine our direction of life, upward or downward.

As Bhikkhu J.Kashyap, in *Buddhism for Everybody,* says: 'The totality of such impressions accumulated during the entire span of one's life is transmitted as one's *kamma* to his next birth.'

The essence of the very first verse of the *Dhammapada* is that a man is the sum-total of what he thought (or mentally acted) in the past. The differences that we find in the character of different individuals — some are cruel, some are compassionate, etc. — are due to the past karmas they have accumulated. Buddhism aims at purification of mind by performing good deeds, having good thoughts of charity, love, generosity, kindness and compassion. We might ourselves experience that the effect of a good action is satisfaction, peace and composure of mind and the aftermath of an evil deed is restlessness, fear and insecurity.

Rebirth

Buddhism believes in the rebirth of man till he is fully liberated, has realised nirvana. However, it does not believe in any permanent atman

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which takes rebirth or finally enters into nirvana. It sounds paradoxical that there is a rebirth but no soul.

Buddhism does not postulate any kind of transmigration of an identical entity. There is nothing which comes out of one body at death and enters into another at rebirth. As we have said above, life is a continuum, a process of becoming. Our craving or tanha gives rise to clinging or upadana and that to existence or bhava and that to rebirth or jati. The life-forces or the five khandhas do not die but continue to take some other shape or form and thus a new life is born. The five khandhas or physical and mental forces have themselves the power to take a new form.

Later Buddhist schools conceived the idea of *santati* or *santana,* i.e., continuity of the life-forces. There is continuity but nothing remains the same for even two consecutive moments. Therefore, there is nothing permanent or unchanging, no immortal soul (*atman)*, which transmigrates. It is a series that continues without any break, changing every moment. An example may be given of a flame, which burns all through the night. It can be called neither the same nor different. According to Buddhism, as long as there is a craving to live, to become, man takes a new form at birth in a continual process. And the samsara or the cycle of continuity goes on. The driving forces of life continue in the cycle of death and birth and come to a stop only when one reaches the supreme goal of nirvana. Then one can say,as is often found quoted in the Buddhist texts,

> **Destroyed is the birth, lived is the higher life; done is what has to be done; there is no further birth or existence.**
>
> **Dighanikaya**

Mind and its Power

The Indian religious tradition has generally laid emphasis on the inner powers of mind, but Buddhism has given special importance to mental culture. George Grimm in his book, *The Doctrine of Buddha,* subtitled *The Religions of Reason and Meditation,* emphasises its mental aspect. The inner powers of mind and resources are infinite, and Buddhism aims at developing them fully through the process of meditation, clearing all cobwebs of *kleshas* or defilements. It is the thought, volition, cognition that matters most in the development of personality. It has been rightly said that wars first begin in the minds of men and then appear in physical form. The *Dhammapada,* verses 42-43, says that a misdirected mind can engulf a man in the worst misery which even an enemy cannot, and the right mental attitude can do more good than even one's parents.

In Buddhism rose a school called *Yogachara* or *Vijnanavada* which developed the theory of 'mind only' or *chittamatrata.* This idealist school believed that external objects were only mental projections and derived inspiration from the sayings of the Buddha in which he had emphasised the cultivation of mental culture. We find the Buddha often saying to his

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disciples even in early texts such as the *Anguttaranikaya I,* 'Mind, Bhikkhus, is pure in itself. It is only defiled by outside impurities.'

Internal purification or *chitta-vishuddhi* is more important than outward rituals. A dip in the Ganga with a defiled mind will not bring salvation. Right mental attitude — cultivation of feelings of compassion or *karuna,* friendliness or *maitri,* becoming happy in the happiness of others, *mudita* — can alone bring peace and happiness to all.

ZEN BUDDHISM

An important development in the history of Buddhism is Zen, which recently has been drawing much attention in the East as well as in the West. Zen, the finest flower of Buddhism, developed in Japan. It came to Japan from China, but its roots are in India and the development of Zen is to pass beyond the intellect. The Buddha has explained dhamma as *atakkavacara* (beyond intellect). The intellect is merely an instrument of knowledge. Zen aims at direct and instant enlightenment. All else is unnecessary and must be abandoned. Even the dharma is to be abandoned, what to speak of *adharma,* as has been mentioned in the *Majjhimanikaya I.*

Zen is *jiriki* or self-effort as distinct from *shin* or *sukhavati* (Pure Land) Buddhism, which favours *tariki,* salvation by another power. The Pure Land school of Japan is a later development which believes in the grace of Buddha Amitabha. Zen is inspired by the early sayings of the Buddha, viz., 'Be ye an island unto yourselves. Depend ye not on others,' etc. It is an act of discovering oneself. Due to ignorance, man does not realise his Buddha-nature. Zen developed its own technique of the 'breakthrough', 'flash', 'sudden path', *satori,* the Japanese word for 'Enlightenment'.

Sariputta, the foremost disciple of the Buddha, heard a verse from Assaji and obtained the eye of truth or dhamma, i.e., 'whatever is born is subject to cessation.' And he transmitted the same message to another prominent disciple of the Buddha named Moggallana, who also attained the dhamma vision. The Chinese and Japanese scriptures furnish many accounts of this instant enlightenment. However, some scholars are of opinion that the theory of sudden enlightenment is the product of the Chinese mind which revolted against the intellectual Buddhism of India. But it can be traced not only to early Indian Buddhism but also to later Mahayana tradition.

Zen also used *koans* as the basis of meditation. These latter consist of riddles and puzzling stories which one should think about till the intellect is exhausted and the limitation of the intellect is realised. This leads to sudden enlightenment.

THERAVADA, HINAYANA AND MAHAYANA

Theravada

This means 'Doctrines of Elders'. By 'Elders' is meant here elder monks (theras) of the Sangha. After the passing away of the Buddha, Buddhism gradually was divided into various schools, traditionally eigh-

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teen in number. Theravada is considered the earliest and most original by many scholars. Sometimes it is referred to as the 'Southern School of Buddhism', but this is a misnomer. The aim of a follower of Theravada is to become an *arhat* or to realise nirvana through the triple recourse to ethical conduct, mental discipline and higher knowledge or wisdom or *panna.*

Hinayana

This is a relative term and can be explained in comparison with *Mahayana.* It means a 'Lesser Vehicle' of emancipation. It is coined by the Mahayanists as a derogatory term for Hinayanists, as the former think that the aim of the latter is to seek personal nirvana, which is a lower or *hina* aim. Mahayanists put Theravada along with another major school named Sarvastivada in the Hinayana. Sometimes Hinayana is also called *Sravakayana* (vehicle of followers, disciples) or *Arhat-yana.* Arhathood is the ideal of Theravada. An arhat is one, as has been pointed out, who has realised nirvana. There is another ideal in Hinayana, that of *Pratyekabuddha* or individual buddha, a buddha who seeks his own enlightenment and never guides others. This is also called a lower aim. Hence this also comes under Hinayana.

Mahayana

Literally, it means the 'Great Vehicle' which takes one to enlightenment or bodhi. The followers of this school believe that the Buddha taught universal salvation. One should aim at becoming a *buddha* to lead others also towards Buddhahood. One should not aim at personal nirvana, but renounce the very idea of it to help suffering humanity. For becoming a buddha, it is necessary to be a bodhisattva and to engage oneself in altruistic activities. A bodhisattva is a future buddha. Literally, the word bodhisattva means 'one who exerts for the attainment of bodhi or enlightenment . The ideal of Mahayana is Buddhahood and the career of a bodhisattva is the path towards the attainment of that object. *Mahayana* is also called *Bodhisattvayana,* or *Buddhayana,* etc.

BUDDHIST RESURGENCE

Resurgence or rediscovery of Buddhism, which has been an ongoing activity in India for the last hundred years, is the most remarkable event in the history of religions. Buddhism is being rediscovered and revived centuries after its disappearance, although Buddhist culture had always influenced religious movements in India. And it is not by force or temptation that Buddhism is reviving but by the realisation by segments of Indian society of the loss that India suffered during its disappearance. Our first Prime Minister of free India, Jawaharlal Nehru, greatly valued the contribution of Buddhism to world peace and emphasised its salient features. The 2500th Buddha Jayanti was celebrated in his time in 1956 with great enthusiasm and eclat, with many representatives from abroad participating in various functions to commemorate the great event. In the celebrations, the Ashokan message of conquest by righteousness or

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dharmavijaya was re-emphasised and India's dedication to world peace reiterated.

The mass conversion of about four million former untouchables under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution, in 1956 was an epoch-making event in the history of the revitalization of the Buddhist movement in India. Many Indian intellectuals were also drawn towards Buddhism because of its rational approach, humanism and sublime ethical values. Buddhist studies found place in the seats of higher learning and, apart from independent departments of Pali and Buddhist Studies in some universities, there is now a full-fledged Buddhist Institute at Nalanda (Bihar) University of international repute.

The symbols of independent India, the Ashokan Pillar and *Dharma-chakra* or the Wheel of Law, are now part of our national heritage. They remind us of the past glory of the age of Buddhism and signify its dynamic resurgence in the land of its birth.

SACRED BUDDHIST LITERATURE

Tripitaka or the three baskets is the sacred literature of Buddhists of the Theravada School. The Tripitaka enshrines the words of the Buddha and is divided into three parts, (1) *Vinayapitaka,* (2) *Suttapitaka* and (3) *Abhi-dhammapitaka.*

The *Vinayapitaka* contains Buddha's teachings regarding the rules of conduct of the monks and many episodes and events associated with the development of the Sangha, including the two Buddhist Councils.

The *Suttapitaka* contains five collections or *Nikayas* in which Buddha's sermons and dialogues on the dhamma are given. The five Nikayas are as follows: (1) *Dighanikaya* (collection of long discourses), (2) *Majjhimanikaya* (medium-sized discourses), (3) *Samyuttanikaya* (mixed discourses), (4) *Ang-uttaranikaya* (graduated discourses), (5) *Khuddhakanikaya* (miscellaneous small and big texts including the *Jataka* and the *Dhammapada*).

The *Abhidhammapitaka* (higher or further explanation of dharma) contains seven texts which enumerate and explain Buddhist concepts and technical terms. These seven texts discuss matters of philosophical and psycho-logical interest.

Most popular texts of Buddhism are the *Dhammapada* (verses on the Buddhist doctrine) and the *Jataka* (birth stories of the former lives of the Buddha), the *Suttanipata* (collection of Buddha's sermons mostly in verse with occasional prose introductions) and the *Khuddakapatha* (short readings in verse occurring in other parts of scriptures which are also recited by monks in Buddhist ceremonies).

The Mahayana sects have their own sacred scriptures in the *Maha-yana sutras* also called *Vaipulya sutras* or large discourses which contain the Buddha's sermons purported to have been delivered at various places

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during his earthly career. They contain dialogues between the Buddha and bodhisattvas or buddhas in the making or future buddhas on various doctrinal matters. The most important scriptures of the *Mahayana* are *prajnaparamita sutras* which contain Gautama Buddha's discourses on the perfection of wisdom or *prajna.*

SANGHA, BUDDHIST LAITY AND ORDINATION

As stated earlier, devotion to the Sangha is expressed by a layman through acts of reverence and material support in the form of *dana* or offerings of food and other daily requisites of monks. The three Jewels or *Triratna,* viz., (1) Buddha, (2) Dharma and (3) Sangha, are compared, respectively, to (1) physician, (2) medicine and (3) attendant in sickness or nurse. This shows that the Sangha is the promoter of the well-being of the laity in both spiritual and material senses. However, it may be remembered that the monk is not a mediator between some unseen power and the layman. He only works as preserver and supporter of religious life and guides the laity towards life's final aim, nirvana.

For becoming a member of the Sangha, one has to make a formal request to the Sangha, take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. First the candidate for the full membership of the Sangha shaves his head and beard, leaves his home, wears a yellow robe and becomes a *shramanera* or novice. He attends on bhikkhus and gets training. On attaining twenty years of age, he can become a full member by a simple ceremony conducted by senior monks in which the ten precepts or *sikkhapadas,* viz. (1) to abstain from injury to living beings, (2) from theft, (3) from unchastity, (4) from falsehood, (5) from intoxicating drinks and drugs. (It may be remembered that the first five precepts are to be taken by a lay Buddhist also, (6) from untimely meals, (7) from dance, song, music and unseemly shows, (8) from the use of garlands, perfumes, etc., (9) from lofty and luxurious seats and (10) from receiving gold and silver, are given to the monk and he is interrogated whether he knows the rules of vinaya or conduct. A monk has to live in complete poverty, procuring his food by begging.

The institution of *bhikkhunis* or nuns is now no more prevalent in Buddhist countries. It has been abolished although at the time of the Buddha the Bhikkhuni Sangha or order of nuns was formed at the instance of Ananda and much against the wishes of the Buddha, as the texts tell us.

Bhikkhus are instructed to stay in one place during the rainy season. There is also one *Kathina* ceremony when the laity offers new robes to monks after the rainy season.

The members of the Sangha are required to meet every fortnight for *Uposatha* ceremony to recite a code of rules known as *Patimokkha* or Sanskrit *pratimoksha.* The presiding senior monk recites the formulary which consists of 227 rules of conduct for monks. Those who commit transgressions confess them before the Sangha, so that they become morally pure.

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The Scriptures

Now, look you, Kalamas, do not be led by reports, nor by tradition, nor by hearsay. Be not led by the authority (of religious texts), nor by mere logic or inference, nor by view of appearances, nor by speculative opinions, nor by seeming possibilities, nor by the idea: 'This is the view of our ascetic teacher.' But, O Kalamas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome (akusala) and impure and disapproved by the wise, and are conducive to loss and sorrow, then give them up . . And when you know, O Kalamas, for yourselves that certain things are wholesome (kusala) and pure, and approved by the wise, and are conducive to benefit and happiness, then accept them and follow them.
Anguttaranikaya, I, pp. 174-76

Not by birth does one become an outcast, nor by birth does one become a brahmin. By deeds one becomes an outcast, by deeds one becomes a brahmin.
Vasalasutta, Suttanipata, verse 27

The friend who is constant in happiness and adversity is to be reckoned as good-hearted on four grounds: he tells you his secrets; he does not betray your secrets; in trouble he does not forsake you; for your sake he will even lay down his life.
Sigalovadasutta, Dighanikaya, Vol. III, p. 145

Countless are the births wherein I have circled and run, seeking for but never finding the builder (craving) of this house (body); painful is this being born again and again.

Now thou art seen, O builder of the house; thou shalt not build the house again. All thy rafters (passions) are broken, the ridgepole (ignorance) is shattered, my mind is freed from all constructions (i.e., has attained the nibbana), it has attained the cessation of craving.
Dhammapada, verses. 153-154

For him who is pure in mind, any day is auspicious, any day is hallowed. Cleansed and pure in deeds, he ever fulfils his (religious) observances.
Majjhimanikaya, I, p. 52

Even as a solid rock is unshaken by the wind, so are the wise unshaken by praise or blame.
Dhammapada, verse 81

Being cruel and harsh, slandering, betraying, being unmerciful, proud, miserly, giving nothing—this is impurity and not the eating of meat.
Suttanipata, Amagandha Sutta, verse 6

Ceasing and abstaining from sin, to shun intoxicating drinks, self-control, not neglecting one's duties, this is the best mangala *(good omen).*
Khuddakapatha, Mangala-sutta, verse 7

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There are no visible (things), the external world is mind (citta); merely mind is seen; body, property and environment I call but mind.
All this is but mind. Mind makes its appearance in two ways: As (the object) to be grasped and as the grasper (i.e. the subject). There is no Self and nothing of the nature of a Self.
Lankavatara-Sutra

He is a man of bright complexion who fixes his attention on the present moment: never brooding over what is past nor worrying about the future.
Samyuttanikaya

A fool, though awarded a high rank, is a wise man's slave. In time of need only the wise can handle the affairs, while the fool will lose his head in such a case.
Jataka

Having cooled his mind, being free from passion, not clinging to any sensual pleasure, he is a Brahmin who has extinguished his passion and always lives a happy life.
Samyuttanikaya

He whose mind is well-controlled, who attentively listens to the Buddha's teachings, who has eradicated all his passion, realized the immovable state, attained the perfect peace will enter into the full-final extinction because his passion has been destroyed.
Theragatha

The righteous man rejoices in this world, he rejoices in the next; he rejoices in both. He rejoices (thinking) 'good has been done by me'. He rejoices still more when he has gone to the good place.
Dhammapada 18

One should not associate with friends who are evil-doers nor with persons who are despicable; associate with friends who are virtuous, associate with the best of men.
Dhammapada, 78

That place is delightful where saints dwell, whether in the village or in the forest, in deep water or on dry land.
Dhammapada, 98

Better than a thousand verses composed of meaningless words is one word of a verse on hearing which one becomes peaceful.
Dhammapada, 101

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Him I call a Brahmin whose passion and hatred, pride and hypocrisy have fallen like a mustard seed from the point of an awl.
Dhammapada, 407

Him I call a Brahmin for whom there is nothing before, behind, or between, who has nothing and is without attachment.
Dhammapada, 421

What, Ananda, dòes the order expect of me? I have, Ananda, expounded the teaching without distinguishing an inside and outside. Therefore, Ananda, be islands unto yourselves, a refuge unto yourselves; take the teaching as island, the teaching as refuge, have no other refuge!
Dighanikaya

This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering: it is craving (tanha) that leads to rebirth, is pleasurable, connected with passion (and) takes delight here and there, namely, craving for lust, craving for becoming, craving for destruction.
Mahavagga

Not knowing of suffering, the origin of suffering, the termination of suffering (and) the way leading to the termination of suffering—this is called ignorance.
Majjhimanikaya

Transient are conditioned things. Work out your own salvation with diligence.
Last words of the Buddha, *Mahaparinibbanasutta, Dighanikaya,* II, p. 119

Festivals

The three highest ideals for Buddhists are *tri-ratnas* (triple gems)—Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (order of monks). They worship Buddha images in temples or in religious ceremonies in their homes, they recite in the Pali language the prose passages and verses from scriptures praising the triple gems (sometimes the scriptures are translated into local languages also). This is the practice especially in the Theravada countries. In fact, a Buddhist is one who has taken refuge in the *tri-ratnas.* In the Mahayana countries also, the 'triple gem' is equally venerated, but the Pali language is not used for recitation. Buddhists offer three articles—flowers, candles and incense—for worshipping the image of the Buddha. These represent Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, respectively.

Buddha Purnima (April or May): The major Buddhist festival which is generally called *Vaishakha Purnima.* In India it is celebrated in important Buddhist temples. It is a national holiday and meetings are held to pay homage to Gautama Buddha and restate his message. Non-Buddhists often participate in the congregations.

Kaza Festival: Ladakhis celebrate many festivals, one of which is held in summer. It is called *Kaza* or *Tsheshu* festival. This is celebrated with dances in June on the tenth day of the 5th Buddhist month at Hemis Gompa near Leh, the capital of Ladakh, the main centre of Lamaism in India. The dancers wear masks to frighten away evil spirits. The festival, which lasts about three days, celebrates the birth anniversary of the great Buddhist patriarch, Padmasambhava, who is considered the founder of Tibetan Buddhism or Lamaism. The Dalai Lama is also worshipped as a living incarnation of Lord Buddha.

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Stupa or Chaitya Puja: An important Buddhist ceremony is *Chaitya Puja* or the worship of mounds or stupas. The stupa enshrines a portion of the bone-relics of the Buddha. Veneration of stupas of various shapes, sizes and materials is a special feature of Asian Buddhism and can be seen in almost all Buddhist countries. Image-worship, although introduced late, approximately five centuries after the Buddha's death, is a part of Buddhist devotion and is a popular feature of Buddhist ceremonies.

Worship of the Bodhi Tree: Another feature which is equally popular is the worship of Bodhi trees *(pipal* or *ficus religiosa)*. The Bodhi tree is worshipped by decorating the branches of the tree with flower-garlands, coloured flags and sometimes by lighting rows of lamps and also by sprinkling milk and scented water on the roots of the tree.

Pilgrimage

A Buddhist must visit holy places associated with the chief events of Gautama Buddha's life. They are (1) Lumbini, the birthplace, in Nepal; (2) Bodh Gaya, the place of enlightenment; (3) Sarnath, where the Buddha delivered his first sermon, and (4) Kusinagar, the place of the Buddha's *mahaparinirvana* or great decease. The pilgrimage to these places has scriptural sanction also. In the *Mahaparinibbana-Sutta,* the Buddha has recommended to his devotees to visit these places for cultivating detachment and religious feelings.

Devotion to the Sangha is expressed by laymen by external acts of reverence and material support in the form of *dana* or offerings of food and other daily requisites of monks. It is a common scene in Buddhist countries to see saffron-robed monks in the early morning with their begging-bowls, walking steadily and going silently from house to house, and standing for a few minutes at each door to receive alms which the laity offers them with great happiness and a sense of fulfilment of a meritorious act.

The festivals and celebrations which are most ancient and important are those commemorating the three major events in the Buddha's life—birth, enlightenment and *parinirvana.* These celebrations take place on the full moon day of the lunar month of Vaishakha, and in some countries every full moon day is an auspicious day and the laity flocks to temples to hear religious sermons and perform *pujas.*

Several other anniversaries of events in the life of the Buddha are celebrated in different parts of the Buddhist world. They include the anniversaries of the first sermon at the Deer Park at Sarnath near Varanasi, known as *Dharmachakra* day, and his descent from the Tusita haven where, according to tradition, the Buddha spent the rainy season after his enlightenment and preached *Abhidharma* or higher dharma to his mother.

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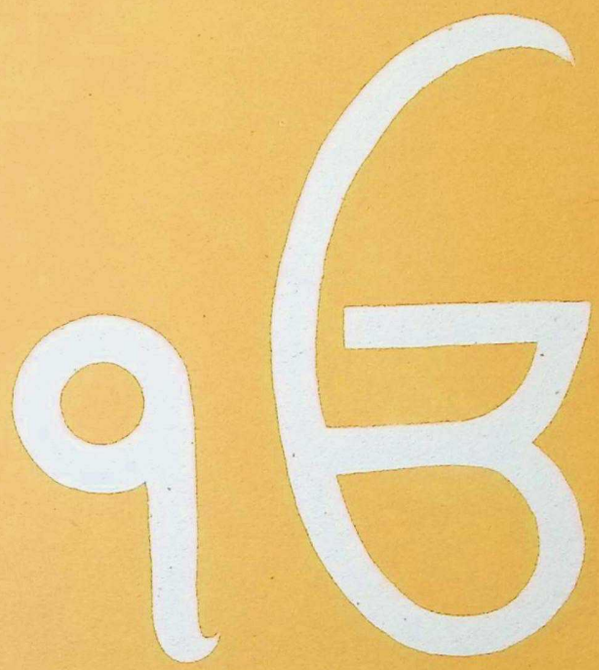

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ਸਚੁ ਤਾ ਪਰੁ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਜਾ ਰਿਦੈ ਸਚਾ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਕੂੜ ਕੀ ਮਲੁ ਉਤਰੈ ਤਨੁ ਕਰੇ ਹਛਾ ਧੋਇ ॥
ਸਚੁ ਤਾ ਪਰੁ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਜਾ ਸਚਿ ਧਰੇ ਪਿਆਰੁ ॥
ਨਾਉ ਸੁਣਿ ਮਨੁ ਰਹਸੀਐ ਤਾ ਪਾਏ ਮੋਖ ਦੁਆਰੁ ॥
ਸਚੁ ਤਾ ਪਰੁ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਜਾ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਜੀਉ ॥
ਧਰਤਿ ਕਾਇਆ ਸਾਧਿ ਕੈ ਵਿਚਿ ਦੇਇ ਕਰਤਾ ਬੀਉ ॥
ਸਚੁ ਤਾ ਪਰੁ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਜਾ ਸਿਖ ਸਚੀ ਲੇਇ ॥
ਦਇਆ ਜਾਣੈ ਜੀਅ ਕੀ ਕਿਛੁ ਪੁੰਨੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਕਰੇਇ ॥
ਸਚੁ ਤਾ ਪਰੁ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਜਾ ਆਤਮ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਕਰੇ ਨਿਵਾਸੁ ॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨੋ ਪੁਛਿ ਕੈ ਬਹਿ ਰਹੈ ਕਰੇ ਨਿਵਾਸੁ ॥
ਸਚੁ ਸਭਨਾ ਹੋਇ ਦਾਰੂ ਪਾਪ ਕਢੈ ਧੋਇ ॥
ਨਾਨਕੁ ਵਖਾਣੈ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਜਿਨਿ ਸਚੁ ਪਲੈ ਹੋਇ ॥

He alone is truly pure whose heart is pure;
Who sheds the filth of falsehood,
And through self-purification makes his body chaste.
He alone is truly pure who loves truth;
One whose heart joys in God's Name shall alone attain the Door of Liberation.
He alone is truly pure who knows the practice of the pure life:
After preparing the soil of the self
Should he sow in it devotion to the Creator.
He alone is truly pure who receives the true precept,
Is full of compassion and gives away his substance in charity.
He alone is truly pure who takes his abode in the pilgrim-spot of his self,
And taking the Master's precept abides therein.
Truth is the sovereign medicine—
All evil it drives out.
Nanak seeks the grace of those
Whose hearts are pure, truthful.

Guru Nanak in Asa-di-Var p. 468

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Sikhism

The Sikh religion, which originated in the Punjab in the teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), is a monotheistic faith, whose adherents at present can be found all over India and in many other parts of the world too. Their estimated number is about twelve million. Their main homeland is the Indian part of the Punjab, but considerable Sikh populations are also found in the adjoining States, such as Haryana, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. Sikhs have settled in fairly large numbers in the larger towns of Uttar Pradesh, particularly after the partition of India in 1947. Migrating from their homes in Pakistan, they have gone and cultivated certain areas in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, which have normally been considered difficult and even dangerous. The Sikhs have added considerably to agricultural production there, and are considered excellent cultivators and farmers. In the larger towns, particularly Bombay, Calcutta and Kanpur, a large number of Sikhs are in various trades and vocations, and they run their own schools and colleges, besides their places of worship, and participate usefully in the civic and economic life of the areas in which they now live. In most places they also run charitable institutions, such as hospitals and free feeding-houses for the poor. Where charity is concerned the Sikhs do not make any distinction of caste or creed, since one of the principal tenets of their faith enjoins them to look upon all mankind with brotherly feelings and to eschew narrow sectarianism. Abroad, the largest Sikh population is to be found in the United Kingdom (about a hundred thousand), where also they have their own temples, *Gurdwaras* or God's Portals, in which they maintain their special traditions of piety and charity for all.

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What has impressed the world most about the Sikhs is their superb martial quality. They make excellent soldiers and officers in all branches of the defence services of India and, because of their bravery, aptitude for discipline and traditions of fearlessness on the battlefield, are recruited in India's armed forces in greater numbers than their proportion in the population of India would warrant. Their ardent patriotism is another great quality which has won for them universal admiration and respect.

Sikhs can easily be recognized by their distinct physical appearance. They wear their hair and beards unshorn, and cover their head with a turban. No other headgear is permissible for them. They are remembered and addressed with the honorific of 'sardar' or 'sirdar', which means a man of high standing. All Sikh names end in 'Singh', which means a 'lion'. This is ordained by their last Apostle, Guru Gobind Singh.

Most Sikhs have come from the various Hindu tribes and castes. There have been conversions also. Considerable numbers of American-born persons have adopted the Sikh faith, and are seen to respect its observances with commendable loyalty. Sikhism, however, does not sanction belief in the caste system, and all human beings are held to be equally deserving of Divine grace, and equally entitled to receive the teachings of religion.

GURU NANAK

The founder of the Sikh faith was Guru (holy teacher) Nanak. He was born in a small town called Rai-Bhoe-ki-Talwandi, about fifty miles south-west of Lahore and now in Pakistan. To honour his association with it, the place came to be called Nankana Sahib (holy Nankana), and monuments in the form of Sikh temples or *Gurdwaras* exist there at spots associated with Guru Nanak's birth and incidents relating to his childhood and youth. Nanak was born in a rural middle-class family of modest means in the Khatri caste, which in villages usually combined farming with small trade. Guru Nanak's own father, Mehta Kalu, was an accountant to the Muslim landlord of the place, a Bhatti Rajput, Rai Bular by name. This Rai Bular figures in the pages of the religious history of Sikhism as a man of piety and sensitiveness to things holy. While most people saw in the meditative child Nanak only signs of languor and truancy from gainful work, the landlord Rai Bular, his father's employer, did have a perception of the divine endowment in him. After a few years, this was recognized by the world. Certain miracles are narrated concerning the early life of Nanak which according to the Indian belief make him a saint or one divinely-appointed to bring a new message to mankind.

Nanak, like other children of his class, was sent to school to learn account-keeping in a kind of Hindi then prevalent; Sanskrit for acquiring sacred learning, and Persian, the language of administration under the Muslim rulers. While he acquired a good deal of proficiency in these branches of study, as is evident from his *Bani* or sacred writings preserved in the Sikh holy scripture, the *Granth Sahib,* he did not show an aptitude

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for any worldly vocation that might have been found profitable by his family. This naturally made his parents anxious about the future of their only son, whom they by all means of persuasion in their power wanted to induce to turn to trade. In his earliest biographical account, called *Puratan Janam-Sakhi,* vivid accounts, though brief, are given of the crisis that developed in the family over the lad's supposed idle ways and tension grew between father and son. Guru Nanak's replies to his parents' expostulations, found in the form of hymns and sacred poetry, expressed the spirit of love of things holy and indifference to worldly pelf and power.

It is stated that the first words that Guru Nanak uttered on receiving the Divine call were, 'There is no Hindu and no Mussalman.' By this he meant, of course, that all men are brothers and equal in the eyes of God, despite outward differences of faith. Religious differences were barriers that came in the way of man's realization of ultimate truth, which is the same for all — Hindus, Muslims and others. True religion consists not of outer formalities and rituals which divide and change from region to region and clime to clime. The spiritual and moral truths for all men are one and identical; and rather than enter into strife with others over the formal aspects of religion, men must attempt to arrive at the basic and essential teachings of religion and follow them. Thus they would be truly religious and win God's approval. This message he was preaching all his life, and it lies at the foundation of the creed of Sikhism that took shape from his teaching.

In order to spread his message in the world, and to end the strife that set religion against religion and sect against sect, he undertook journeys on foot in different directions where lay the centres of orthodoxy — Hindu, Muslim and other. These journeys, which are believed to be four and to have taken a total of nearly thirty years, in the Sikh tradition are called *udasis* or pilgrimages of renunciation of worldliness.

In the first of his journeys, the Guru went towards the east, in lands where lay centres of Brahmanical orthodoxy and of various kinds of yogic cults then prevalent. He visited Kurukshetra and sat close to the sacred tanks there, spreading the message that bathing at places called sacred by itself earned no merit, should one's heart not be rendered free of evil. To wash the body and leave the mind impure is like washing from outside a jar that is full of poison within.

From Kurukshetra, the Guru by stages visited Hardwar and later Banaras, on the holy river Ganga. At both these important centres of orthodoxy, he stopped for considerable periods, and through his persuasive and loving way of speech and the hymns of divine love that he sang, he brought peace of mind and solace to the hearts of the thousands who came thronging to listen to him. Learned Brahmins came to engage him in discussions about the Shastras and the problems of ritual purity and impurity. Guru Nanak's teaching was that all men are equal by birth. It is by their conduct that they become pure or impure.

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His path lay generally along the course of the Ganga; and the spots where he stopped and preached may still be seen at places situated along this sacred river, such as Prayag (Allahabad), Banaras (Varanasi), Bhagalpur and modern Calcutta. Everywhere he found men engrossed in spiritual ignorance, stressing the outer aspects of religion, and superstition and ignoring the basic moral principles without which religion is a mere mockery. The sacred thread, he said, was a mere piece of cotton carded and spun, without the qualities of purity of conduct. The true thread or *janeu, yagyopavita,* acceptable to God was made of 'the cotton of compassion, the yarn of contentment, the knowledge of continence and the twist of pure life. Such, priest, is the true thread of the self. Put it on me if such thou hast.'

About the superstition of *sutak,* whereby a place was held to be impure where a birth had taken place, he proclaimed in pronouncements pregnant with subtle moral meaning: 'The *sutak* of the mind is greed; of the tongue falsehood; of the ears listening to slanderous talk. Birth and death occur by God's will. Hence it is false to look upon a place as impure only because by God's will a new life has appeared there.'

About untouchability and, particularly, the notion whereby food is believed to be rendered impure by the touch of another person, he declared: 'Those who consider themselves high caste, and draw a line round their kitchen space, are only indulging in a superstition. Their minds fouled by falsehood, they rinse them with water. With bodies given to evil-doing, they hypocritically present themselves as saintly persons. True religion lies in meditating on God, who is holy and eternal. Not through ritual, but through purity of mind is the state of spiritual exaltation attained.'

Guru Nanak's heart felt deep anguish at the sufferings of the Indian people, who were misguided not only by false claimants to religiosity, but had to bear the yoke of tyrannical rulers and their minions — Hindu no less than Muslim. In the suffering of his soul, Guru Nanak, turning to the Creator as the sole resort in this dark situation, raised the cry:

This is the dark night of evil —
The moon of truth is nowhere visible.
In this darkness no path is visible —
I have sought for it to distraction.

In this twofold darkness that enveloped the lives of the people, Guru Nanak pointed the way of righteousness or dharma that is above creeds, sects and ritual practices, but is centred in humanity, compassion and love for God. Not in the way pointed out by selfish priests and false claimants to sainthood or the system set up by rapacious rulers lay hope for people to find fulfilment in truth and virtue, but in the way of devotion and the widest practice of morality that must reach out in compassion to all human beings.

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Guru Nanak and other Religions

An important element in the corporate life of the Indian people by Guru Nanak's time was the fact of Muslim rule which had then been established for over three centuries in the Punjab, and for a slightly shorter period in other parts of Northern India, extending upto Bengal. Besides, large Muslim populations had risen in many parts of the country, mainly out of the converts to Islam from a number of Hindu castes. There was a minority of Muslim settlers from across the Indian frontiers proper — the Pathans, Turks, Persians, Arabs and others. These constituted generally the ruling and aristocratic classes, into whose ranks were admitted those converted from the upper classes among the Hindus, such as the Rajputs and the landowning aristocracy.

Guru Nanak's compassion, universal in its scope, embraced all mankind. The sufferings of the common Muslims, the poor working folk, pained him no less than the sufferings of Hindus. On the rulers of the day, his comment was harsh and unsparing: 'The rulers are blood-thirsty beasts, and their officers are hunting hounds. None do they allow to rest in peace.' This was absolutely true of a selfish class that lived by exploiting the people, and added to their suffering by their extortions. The courts of law were corrupt, said Guru Nanak: 'The *Kazi,* or judge, speaks falsehood and eats filth.' This, of course, meant receiving bribes which was a common practice unashamedly indulged in in those times.

India had no dearth in that age, as in any other, of thousands upon thousands of priests and mendicants who engaged in disputation as to the merit of their own sects and aimed only at scoring a dialectical victory, or engaged in barren ritual, austerity and superstitious practices. Few had any vision of the higher life or of a social order free from evil and corruption. The result was that corruption at all levels flourished, and the whole vast country presented a scene of festering evil. For one good and holy man in a temple, mosque or hermitage, there would be hundreds that were idlers and corrupt, and had an eye only on benefiting themselves by entangling the people in pseudo-religion and superstition, and extracting from them offerings, sacrifices and charities. In the mansions of the rich and the powerful, the courts of rulers and places of public justice, festering immorality reigned. It was in this situation that Guru Nanak came to help suffering humanity.

His message to Muslims and to Hindus, the two main communities in the population of India, was similar. It was a message of humanity, goodwill, compassion and high ethical conduct. Without asking anyone to renounce his faith, he, on the contrary, called upon each, Hindu as well as Muslim, so to practise his faith as to make it the way of true service of man. He called upon Hindus to show compassion, contentment, purity and continence. The true holy watering-spot, or *tirtha,* he affirmed, was the Guru, that is, devotion to God. Whatever garb one might assume out of the

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numerous religious garbs prevalent in India, the essential quest must be to have the sight of the Divine Face.

To the vastly proliferating sects of anchorites and mendicants, who were divided into six principal groups, and sub-divided into hundreds, and who were all subsumed under the generic name of yogis, he pointed out in numerous meditative texts and hymns the true nature of yoga. Not in the beggar's pouch, nor in limbs smeared with ashes nor in the staff nor blow horn nor earrings of glass nor other substances lay true yoga. The true *praxis* of yoga leads to leading a pure life amidst the allurements of *maya (anjan manhe niranjan rahiyai).* To live amidst the impurities of the world like the lotus in water, rooted in it, yet untouched, should be the yogi's ideal. Like his preaching to the followers of orthodox Brahmanism, Guru Nanak instructed the practitioners of yoga in basing their action in purity and service and to offer true guidance to humanity.

Like the Hindu, whose ritual of the sacred thread and *tirthas* or pilgrimages was restated by Guru Nanak in moral and spiritual terms, to the Muslim too he pointed out the true spirit of his observances — the *namaz,* prayer, *roza,* fasting during the month of Ramzan, *sunnat,* circumcision, *tasbih,* rosary and the holy kaaba. All these must invest his personality with qualities of morality and compassion. He must through the practice of his religion shed his impurities as does iron when rubbed on the grindstone, and shine forth in moral and spiritual splendour. Should a Mussalman be such, he would be a true blessing for mankind, and the Guru no doubt would approve of the life and conduct of such a one. Alluding to the conflict of Hindu and Muslim, which in India was already some centuries old, he pronounced: Both paths, that is, the Hindu and the Muslim, are one. Only he who realizes this truth will find acceptance with God. Anyone holding the contrary view, that is, preaching hate and strife, would burn in hell-fire.

Guru Nanak's Teachings
The Social Conscience

From the above summary of Guru Nanak's teachings, it will be clear that to him what was of cardinal importance was the conversion of the heart, the formation of the spiritual vision in the seeker. The forms of established faiths did not matter, as they merely meant changing over from one kind of superficial religion to another. Nor did Guru Nanak, contrary to the statement of some superficial writers, bring about what has been called a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. His was a special divine revelation, in which truth and purity, devotion and service had priority of place. These qualities could cohere with either of the established faiths, and the Guru did not call upon anyone to renounce the religion he professed. On the contrary, he called upon each one to practise it in an enlightened way, so that it may lead to the supreme fulfilment of human life in attaining the mystic vision and to the practice of truth in the world of men.

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In Guru Nanak's teaching, there was no place for abject fear of tyrants, nor for the high-handed and unjust social system that was prevalent, the sight of which moved him to pity for the masses and indignation at the ways of the rulers. He raised his voice against evil and his teaching did not shrink from calling upon the man of God to resist evil even to the point of sacrifice and martyrdom. In this Guru Nanak was unique among the saints and spiritual teachers of India, most of whom commended the life of the recluse, and while leading pure lives themselves, as the better ones among them did, left evil in the social and state systems to go on unchallenged.

In Guru Nanak's time, Babar invaded India a number of times until the famous battle of Panipat of 1526, which made him the ruler of the empire of Delhi. The brunt of his onslaught was borne by the people of the Punjab, which lay in his path as he came down from Kabul. Great was the suffering of the people during these invasions. The Mongol and Uzbek soldiers of Babar in Guru Nanak's vibrant image fell upon the Indians like a tiger on a herd of kine. Great slaughter occurred; cities were burnt down and, most painful of all, the womenfolk of India were dishonoured everywhere. Guru Nanak's four hymns included in the *Granth Sahib,* collectively known as *Babar-vani,* the aggression of Babar, voice the common sufferings of Hindus and Muslims. He has employed the term Hindustan for the invaded land which until recently used to refer to the whole of northern India. Guru Nanak thus lamented the fate of people of the entire country — perhaps for the first time in history. The dishonouring of the womenfolk drew from Guru Nanak's soul a wail of anguish.

After his journeys to various parts of the country to spread his message, as he was ageing, Guru Nanak decided to set up, away from towns and villages, a centre from where the light of spiritual truth would emanate and spread in all directions. This was to take the form of a colony or ashram, with this difference, however, that the persons living there were to engage in prayer and meditation as well as carry on some useful vocation to earn their simple livelihood, and out of that to give away to the needy whatever could be spared. This spot, known as Kartarpur, God's Manor, on the right bank of the Ravi, was a small farm with a few simple farm-houses. Here Guru Nanak himself, along with the members of his family and a few disciples, lived. Simple agricultural operations were carried on to raise food for the inmates. Casual travellers and those who came to seek guidance from the Guru and to have a sight of him were invited to share the simple food that was prepared. This was the beginning of the Sikh institution of *langar* or free food for strangers and the poor to which anyone might contribute food or money.

Guru Nanak left this mortal world at the age of seventy in 1539. During his life, during which he strove to spread the truth and to guide mankind along the path that leads away from strife and evil-doing, his personality was impressed on the minds of the Indian people as that of a man of God,

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to whom all were like brothers. Those who came to listen to his teaching and endeavoured to live in accordance with it were called 'Sikhs'. *Sikh* is the popular form of the Sanskrit term *shishya,* which means a disciple. Guru Nanak had the vision of a continuing holy ministry by men who should spread his message and mould the lives of the masses in accordance with it. In order that this message may not be lost, it was recorded in a volume or *pothi* and later, when the *Adi Granth* came to be compiled, Guru Nanak's teachings, which are in the form of hymns of divine love and spiritual idealism, came to be incorporated in it.

Before Guru Nanak departed from this world he after careful consideration and trial of fitness nominated a devoted disciple named Lehna, whose mind he found enlightened and in whom reigned supreme the spirit of love and humility, to be his successor. Lehna he renamed 'Angad', born of his own self in token of his great love for his person and all it stood for. As became customary, before he passed away, Guru Nanak made obeisance to the new Guru, who was now the repository of the Divine Light.

An incident that is narrated in the old biography, the *Janam-Sakhi,* is that over his mortal remains Hindus and Muslims disputed, because both venerated him equally. Finding only flowers, when the sheet covering the body was lifted, each group disposed of these according to the rites customary to it. Thus, in death as in life, Guru Nanak continued to be claimed by all humanity, and no sect or group could limit his greatness within its confines.

THE DOCTRINES

As stated earlier, Sikhism is a monotheistic faith. Its conception of the Supreme Being embraces both aspects conceived in Indian philosophy — the Unattributed, *Nirguna,* and the Attributed *Saguna, Sargun.* In its unattributed aspect, which is unknowable and inaccessible by the human mind, the Supreme Being is called *Par-Brahma* to emphasise its inscrutable and mystic character. This Brahma is known in more orthodox Sanskrit terminology as Brahman, and is different from the deity Brahma, the creative aspect of the Indian trinity. Guru Nanak preferred to designate the unattributed Supreme Being by the term *Ek Onkar,* written with the figure 1 preceding Onkar set down as a syllable, *akshara* — unfragmented into letters. *Ek Onkar* stands at the beginning of the text of the *Granth Sahib,* and is invoked on all occasions when divine blessing is to be sought and an atmosphere of holiness created. A pious Sikh, at the head of any writing, including letters, would inscribe this sacred syllable *Ek Onkar.* This is the equivalent of Par-Brahma or the Unattributed Supreme Being.

In its creative and attributive aspect, *Ek Onkar* is conceived as *Onkar.* According to Sikh philosophers, Onkar is Ek Onkar in its aspect of operating through *maya.* Maya in Sikh thought is the creative principle; it is that which is the object of the senses and the intellect, what in Greek philo-

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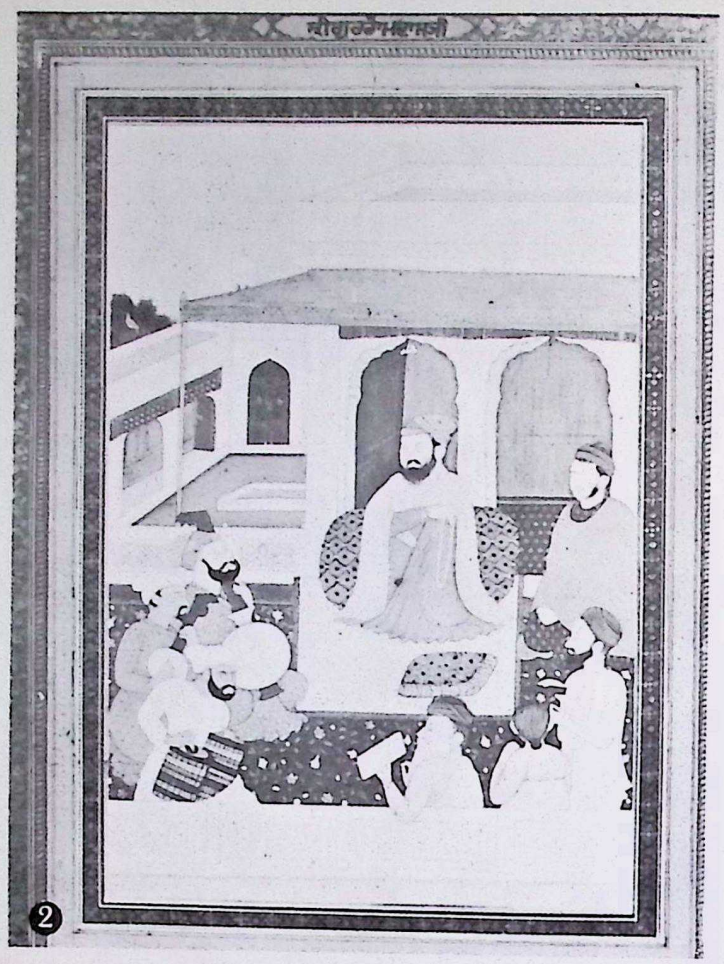

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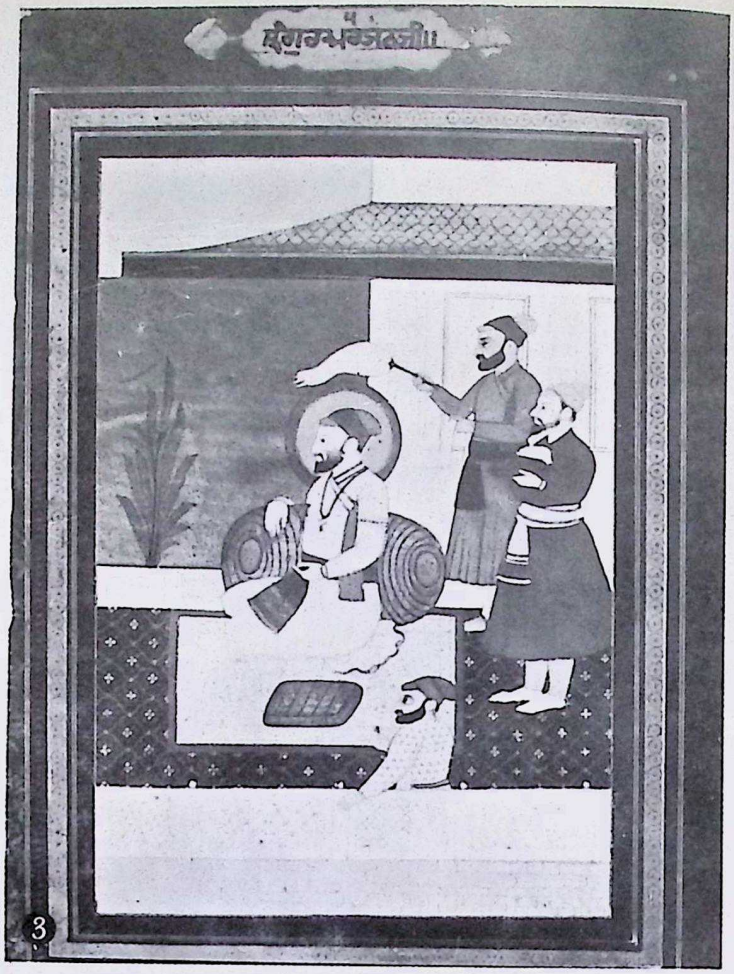

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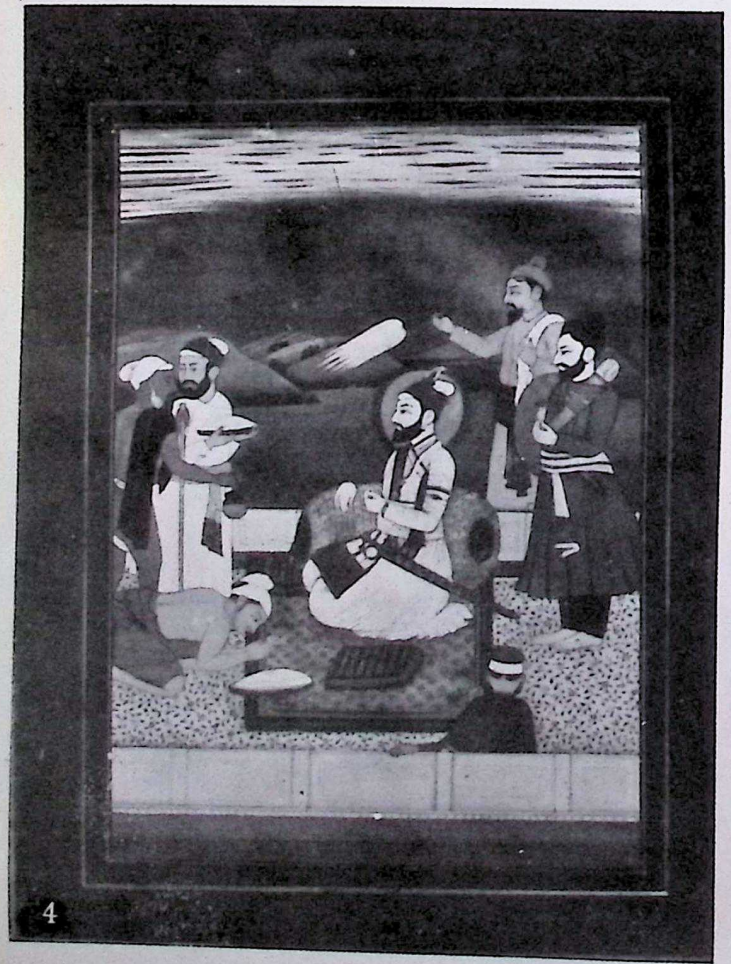

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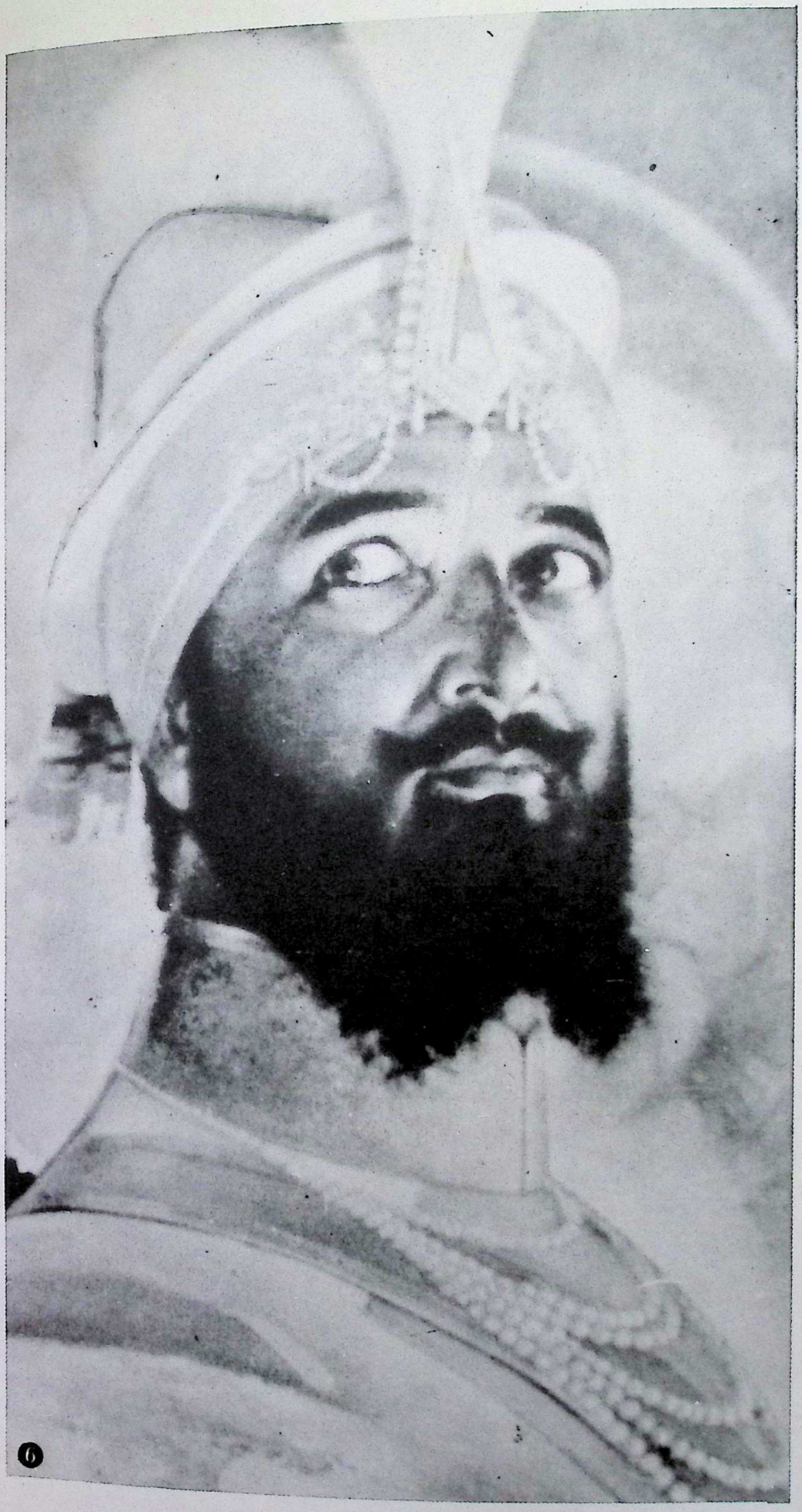

1. "Guru Nanak was born, the mist melted, and there was light." (Bhai Gurdas). Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikhism.

2. "Guru Ram Das (1574-1581), beloved of God, went to God's own city, He gave him a throne." (Mathura). Guru Ram Das, founder of the holy pool called Amritsar, now the centre of Sikh faith.

3. "This grandson of mine will cruise people across the ocean of life." (Guru Amardas). Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606), builder of Hari Mandir, better known as the Golden Temple. He also compiled the *Adi Granth*.

4. "The earlier Gurus adored the temple, the reigning Guru moves from place to place." (Bhai Gurdas). Guru Hargobind (1595-1644) girded two swords—symbolizing spiritual quest and crusading spirit.

5. "Like the shadow of a cloud, whatever you see must disappear." (Guru Tegh Bahadur). Guru Tegh Bahadur (1623-1675), the ninth Guru, was arrested as a rebel and enemy of Islam by the Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb and beheaded in Delhi.

6. "He who loves, he alone has found God." (Guru Gobind Singh). Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the tenth and last Guru, formed the Khalsa in 1699, and installed the *Adi Granth* as the permanent Guru of the Sikhs.

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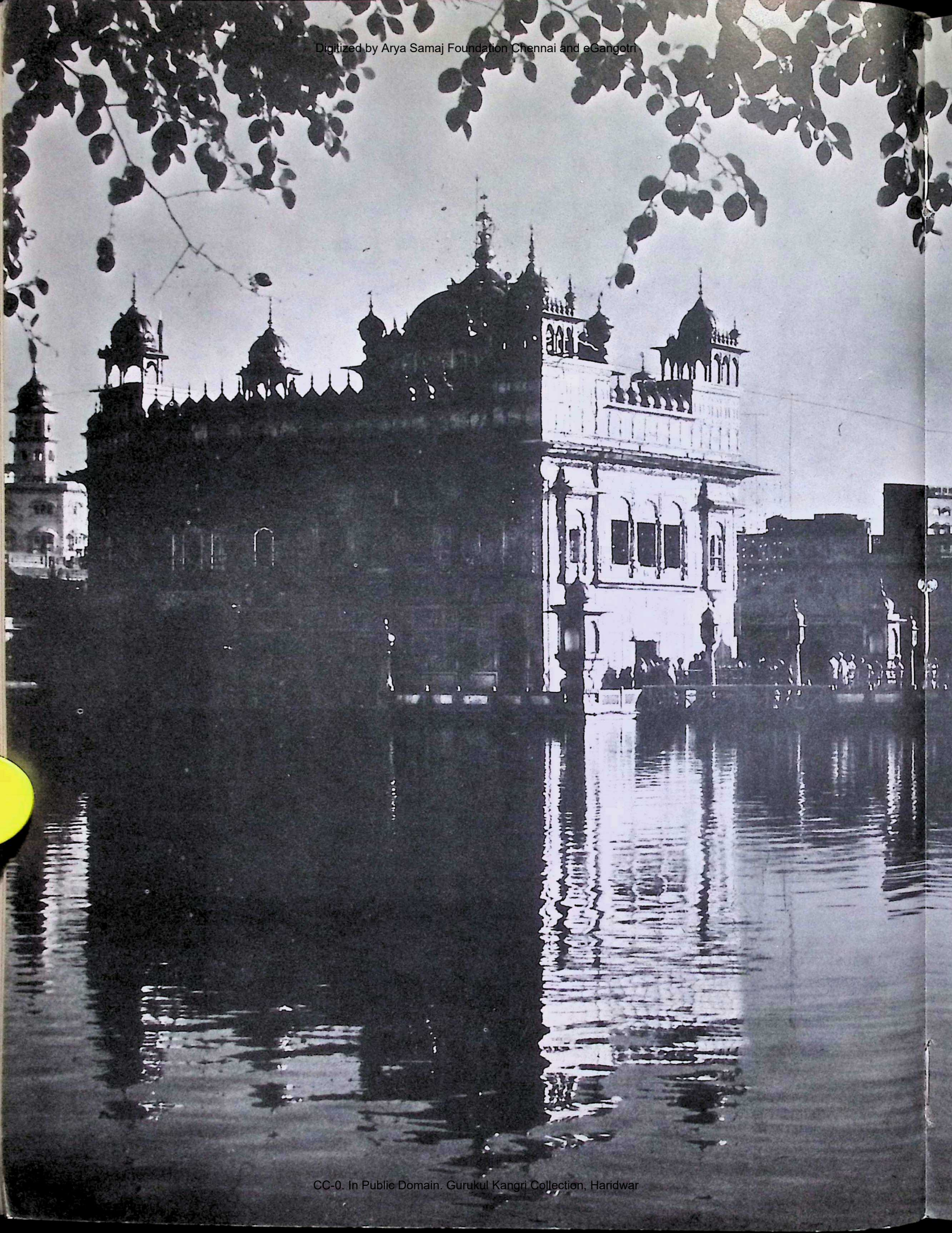

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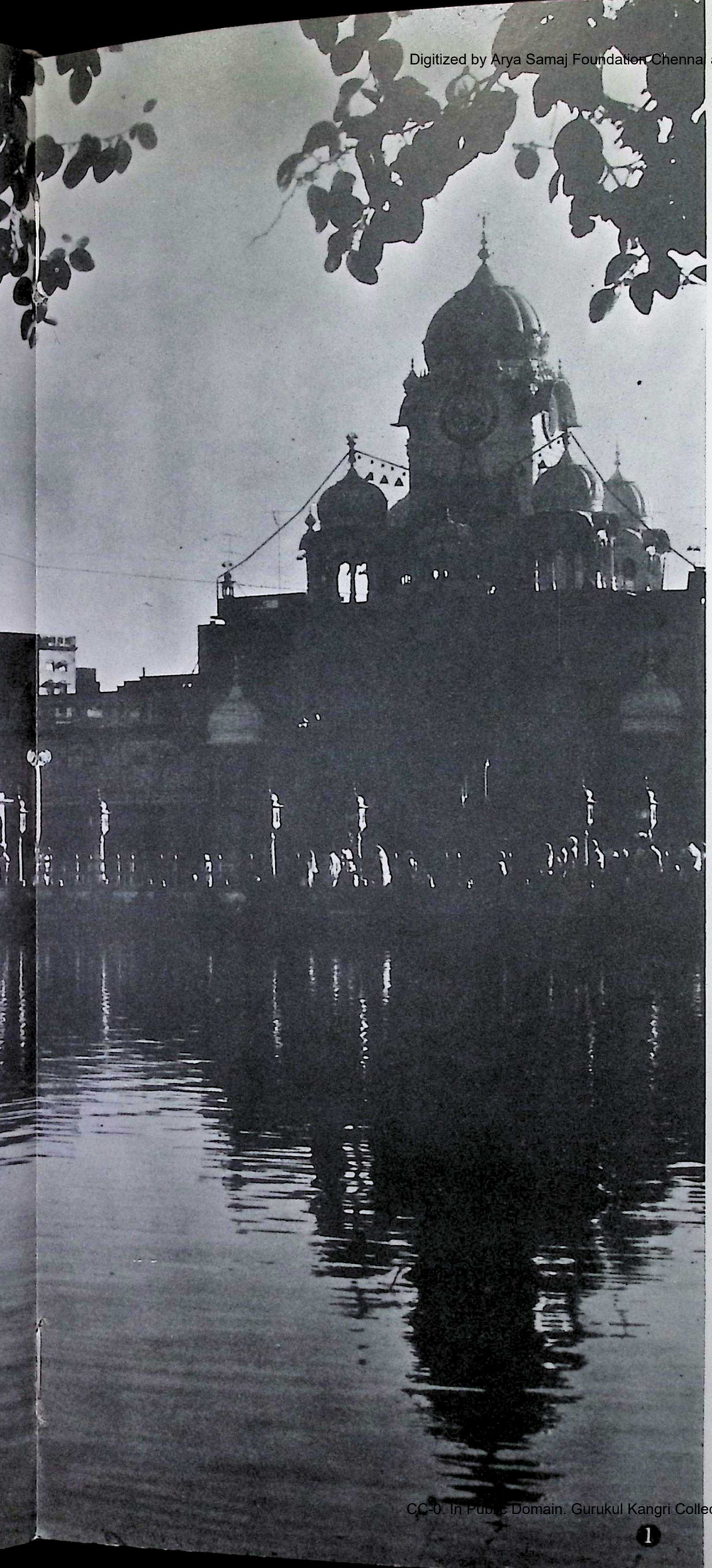

1. "A dip in the tank of Ramdas, all my sins are washed away." (Guru Arjan). The Golden Temple, erected by Guru Arjan Dev, and beautified by Maharaja Ranjit Singh who had the dome gold-plated. The lake is the holiest of the holy.

2. Interior of a gurdwara with Khanda, the Sikh symbol.

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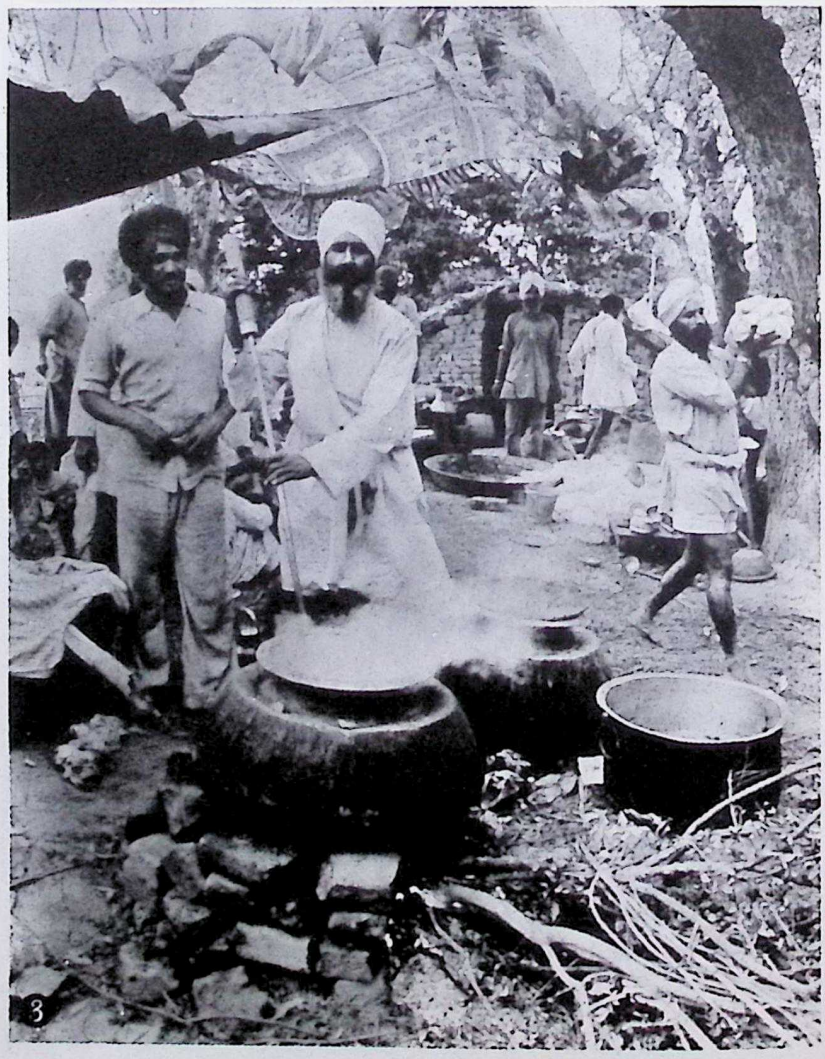

1. Nanded, known as Hazoor Sahib, where Guru Gobind Singh was assassinated by two Pathans hired by the Moghul authorities because he opposed the fanaticism of Emperor Aurangzeb.

2. The *Guru Granth Sahib* being taken out in a ceremonial procession.

3. Langar—community eating with a view to fighting caste distinctions. Langar or temple bread was started by Guru Nanak, who wanted every Sikh to maintain an open kitchen. Every Sikh is expected to contribute.

4. Anandpur Sahib, the Sikh shrine associated with Guru Gobind Singh.

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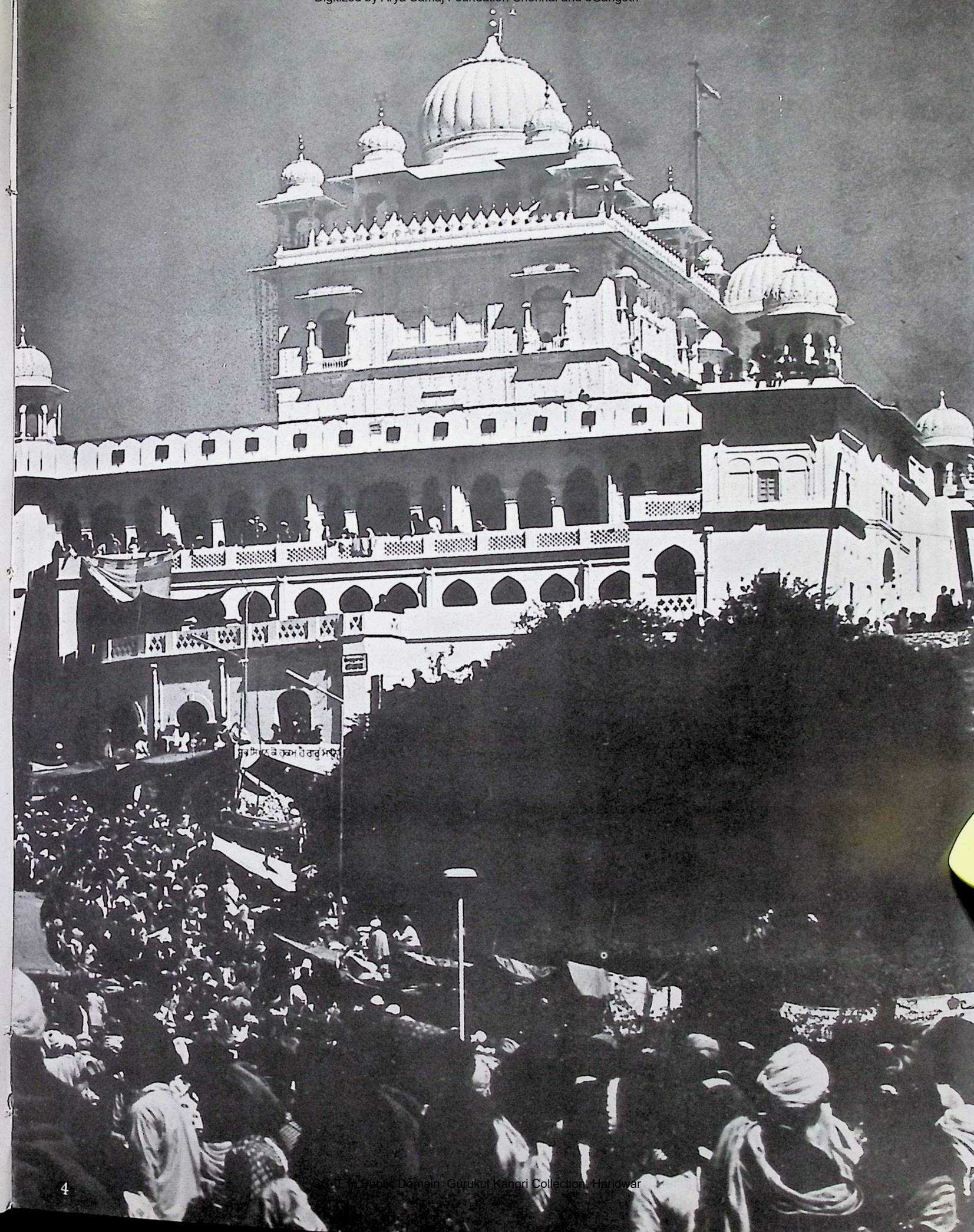

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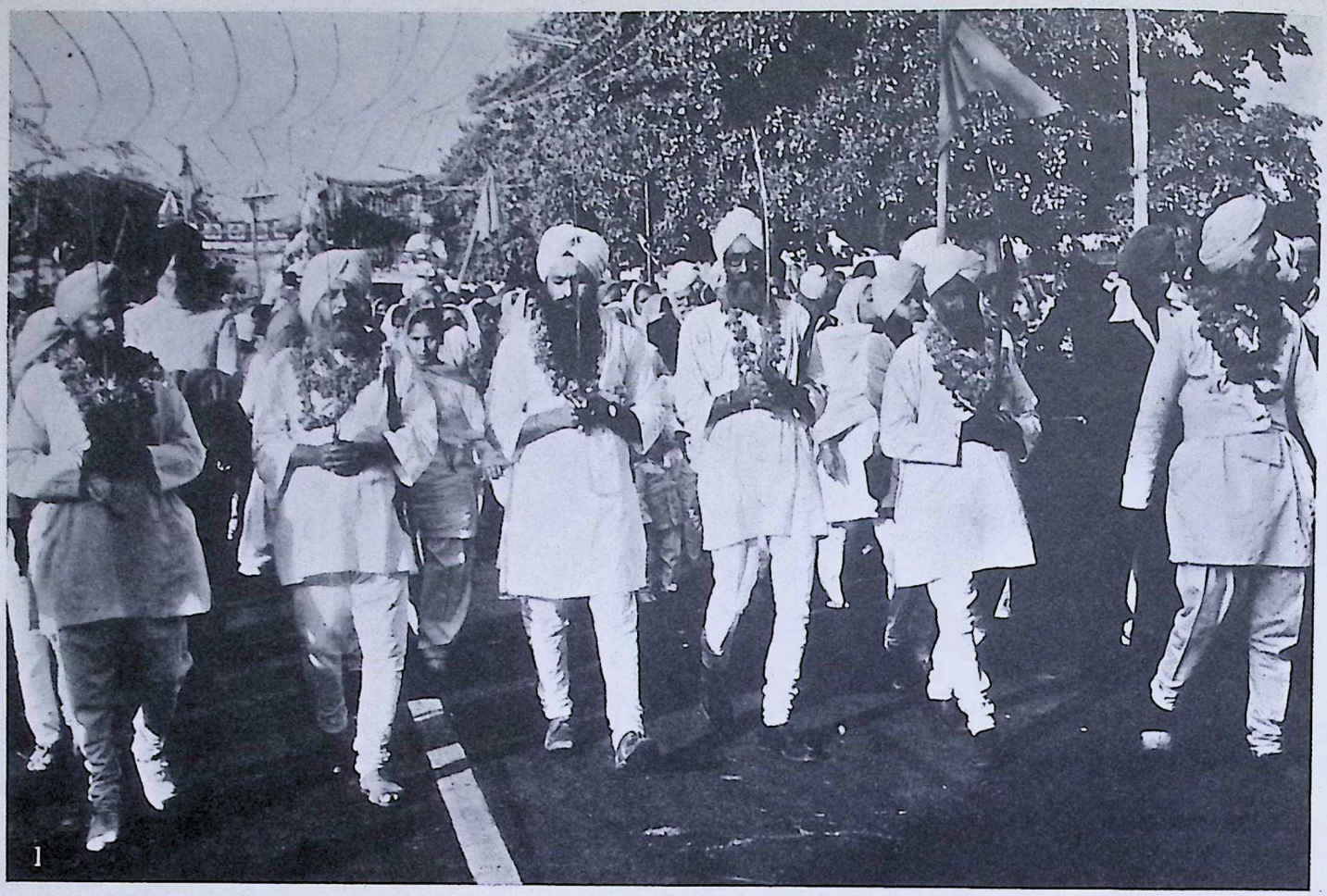

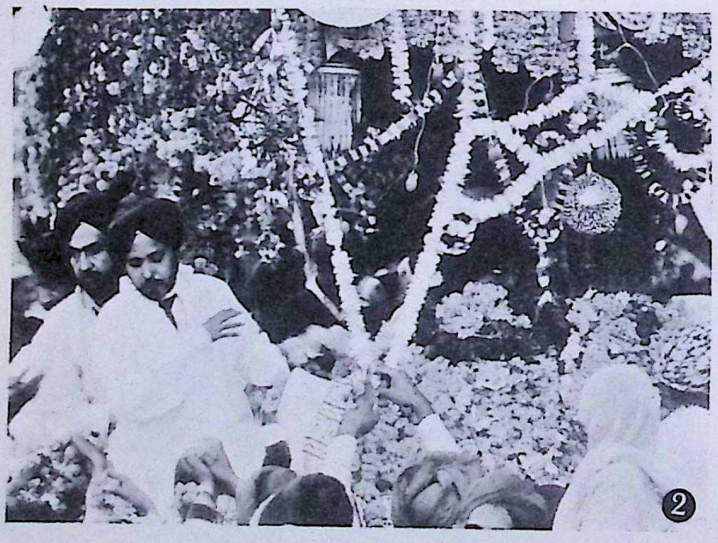

1. Panj Pyare—the Five Chosen Ones, leading a procession during Gur Purab.

2. The *Guru Granth Sahib* being carried in a ceremonial procession during Gur Purab, celebrating the birthday of the Guru.

3. Sisganj Gurdwara, Delhi. Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred here in 1675.

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sophy is called phenomena. While the Supreme Being, Ek Onkar, cannot be approached by the mind or the intellect, but only in the mystic state or *samadhi* induced by divine grace, *Maya* and its manifestations are subject to cognition and the processes of the intellect. *Maya,* being the principle of manifestation, is looked upon also as the veil that conceals the essence, the eternal reality. Hence *Maya* is considered to be the source of the evil tendency in man's nature, and the fount of all actions proceeding from the five evils known to Indian ethical thought as *kama,* or lust, *krodha,* or wrath, violence, *lobha* or avarice, *moha* or illùsion, attachment to material objects and *ahamkar* or egoism. The endeavour of a man of God, the seeker called *jigyasu* in Indian thought and *Sikh, Gurmukh* or one facing Godwards in Guru Nanak's system, is to transcend the lures and shackles of Maya. This is done through prayer, meditation and *seva* or selfless service to mankind. With all man's actions towards realization and transcendence of Maya, divine grace is still held indispensable, for realization is a gift from on high, which no one by his own efforts can achieve. The seeker, under the Guru's guidance, must supplicate grace through prayer, humble service and meditation, and grace may descend upon him. With divine grace he will be able to achieve *mukti, moksha* or liberation, which in essence consists in transcending Maya and living perpetually with and in God. It is another name for the cessation of all desire and achievement of the sublime state wherein all passion and even the processes of the intellect are overcome.

In order to speak to the common folk in terms they would understand, Guru Nanak has also used the popularly current names for God drawn from mythology and the epics. Rama, Gopal, Murari, Narayan, Madho and such other names are employed by him in his hymns and poetical compositions. So also attributive names, expressive of the higher qualities that the human self must endeavour to approach, such as *dayal,* compassionate, *dayanidhi,* ocean of compassion, *sacha,* holy, eternal, *Thakur,* lord, master and many more. From the Muslim tradition, too, that had become popular in certain sections of society in the north, are drawn not only *Allah* and *Khuda,* but also attributive names such as *karim,* kind, benevolent, *rahim,* merciful, *Parvardigar,* the Cherisher, *Sahib,* lord. This part of the Guru's vocabulary is intended especially to foster goodwill between Hindus and Muslims, so that all words expressive of devotion are found equally acceptable. There is no special *deva-bani,* divine language, and no language that may be held impure.

In Guru Nanak's teaching, certain terms stand out with colouring and emphasis especially given by him, and have become part of the Sikh tradition. These are *Guru,* Divine Guide, *Kartar,* Creator, *Akal,* Immortal, beyond time, *Satti-Nam,* the holy Name or Eternal Reality. A Sikh while contemplating spiritual truths must fix his mind on these terms. The characteristic Sikh term for God, *Wahguru,* came after Guru Nanak's time in the course of the development of Sikh spiritual thought.

The path commended to the seeker in the Sikh faith is called *Sahaj.*

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Sahaj implies the way that does not violate or force any of the principles of nature. Not only is the Sikh faith opposed to the performance of miracles as a mark of spiritual eminence, but it has also positively disapproved the pursuit of such powers in the course of the *Sadhana* of various forms of yoga. *Riddhi* and *Siddhi,* which stand for the attainment of such powers, and more so the control of demoniac power by cults like the Kapalika involving dark and unholy practices, have all received severe condemnation in the teaching of the Gurus of the Sikh faith. *Hatha Yoga,* involving the control of breath to arouse occult and secret powers, along with severe self-maceration as is the case with numerous mendicant orders in India, has been pronounced to be a path of delusion.

The path of *Sahaj* is the way of prayer, meditation, concentration of mind on the Divine Essence and of seeking grace. It does not involve enforced celibacy or taking to a life of mendicancy as a mark of holiness. On the contrary, following the example of Guru Nanak himself, the ideal seeker must perform such duties in life as his membership of a morally-organized society requires of him. This may involve hard, honest work for a living, maintaining a family, *grihastha* and, if need be, making sacrifices for the upholding of the moral values, *dharma.* The steps in the path of *sahaj* are what in popular language have been called by Guru Nanak *suniyai, mannai* and *dhyana.* These are, respectively, reverent 'listening' to or absorption of holy truths and texts, pondering these truths to develop faith in them, and concentration of the powers of the mind on the realization of God. Another element especially emphasized by Guru Nanak, along with the three mentioned already, is *bhakti* or devotion.

To ennoble and purify life by conscious effort is the way of prayer, through forbearance, through search after enlightenment, through devotion and austerity and the practice of purity. Such are the elements of sahaj expressed differently (*Japuji,* stanza XXXVIII). In this discipline, likened to the goldsmith's smithy, is forged the pure metal of personality, which is the mystic phrase which Guru Nanak has called *Shabad,* literally sound or holy word, purified consciousness. This is also the state wherein the divine glance of grace perpetually blesses the seeker.

For grace, which is such an important key-concept in Guru Nanak's thought, apart from *Prasad* which comes from the ancient Indian tradition, one used some synonyms from the Muslim *sufi* sources. The *sufis* were seekers of spiritual truths. From the Indian sources, *kirpa (kripa)* and *daya* are also frequently employed, along with certain compound formalities—*dayal, dayalu, kripalu.* So also *meherban, karim* have been taken from Muslim sources.

OTHER GURUS

Guru Angad

Guru Nanak was succeeded on the seat of Gurushipby his disciple

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Lehna, who was renamed Angad. Guru Angad, with devotion and humility, applied himself to the task of continuing his master's mission. He made the institution of *langar,* or free food for travellers, pilgrims and any others who might come to seek his blessings, a tradition among the Sikhs. So great was the enthusiasm of the people for the new faith and such the inspiration given by the Guru, that vast quantities of foodgrains and milk would be brought voluntarily to the Guru's house. These would be cooked and the food distributed to the needy and to all who sought it.

Guru Amar Das

In the tradition now established in the Sikh faith, Guru Angad, as the call came to him to depart from this world, nominated an aged devotee, Amar Das, to succeed him. The new Guru, Amar Das, was a man whose life had been passed in the iron discipline of devotion and service, despite his age — he was over seventy when he came to the holy ministry.

The saintliness and philanthropy of Guru Amar Das is said to have impressed Emperor Akbar, who during one of his tours of the North, came to pay his homage to him at Goindwal, situated near the ferry-crossing on the Beas. The Guru on this occasion is said to have asked the Emperor to remit the land revenue in certain areas which had suffered on account of drought. Earlier, when the Guru had visited the holy places at Kurukshetra and Hardwar, so great was the fervour among the people that no *jizya* was levied on him and those who entered these places in his wake. Akbar is known to have abolished the *jizya* or tax on non-Muslims later.

Guru Amar Das cast off his mortal frame in 1574. As in the case of Guru Nanak and Guru Angad before him, the succession to the holy office was conferred not on considerations of heredity, but of fitness in the incumbent to provide spiritual light to the people, and to fulfil in general the mission of the Founder, Guru Nanak. Guru Amar Das passed over his sons, Mohan and Mohri, and selected for the holy office instead his son-in-law, Jetha, renamed Ram Das, a deeply devoted disciple, performing with humility and sweet resignation the duties required of a disciple.

Guru Ram Das

Guru Ram Das, the period of whose holy ministry was comparatively brief (1574-1581), was also a poet like his predecessors. His hymns have the abandon and sweetness of devotion, and their very lilt inspires the soul with joy in God. He is remembered particularly as the founder of the holy pool called Amritsar, pool of immortality, which has since grown as a centre of the Sikh faith, in a sense the religious capital of the community and one of the important towns of India. Amritsar has importance as a religious centre, as a centre of trade with Central Asia, as a kind of gateway to this area, and during British days also as an important centre of patriotic activity.

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Guru Arjan Dev

Guru Ram Das nominated as his successor his youngest son, Arjan Dev. Guru Arjan, fifth in Guru Nanak's line, was a multi-faceted genius. A scholar, a great poet of divine hymns and poetry of mystical experience, he took a number of important steps to consolidate the work of the organization of the Sikh community, so that it was not merely a sect, but also a faith in its own right. In the first place, in the Pool (Amritsar) made by his father Guru Ram Das, he erected a temple, the Hari Mandir, to be reached by a causeway over the arches of a bridge. This temple, now better known as the Golden Temple, is the holiest of holies of the Sikh faith. The temple, a simple structure of brick and mortar to begin with, with certain characteristic architectural features, surmounted by a dome and turrets, has become the archetype for Sikh temples or Gurdwaras subsequently erected. Being a spot regarded as extremely holy, it has attracted day after day crowds of worshippers and on certain anniversaries, such as Diwali, Baishakhi, the first day of the Indian solar calendar falling in April and the birthdays of the Gurus, pilgrims from far and near visit it. It was around this temple that the town of Amritsar grew, and in course of time became an important trading centre and one of North India's most important cities. It was attacked and demolished by Mughal and Pathan invaders, who sought thereby to finish off the nascent Sikh faith. Thousands have fallen round it, defending it and became martyrs. It was in the nineteenth century that Ranjit Singh, the great Sikh ruler of the Punjab, beautified it, covered it inside and outside with gold-plate and panelled the walls with marble, and imparted to it a grandeur and magnificence.

ADI GRANTH

Another achievement, no less important, of Guru Arjan's period of apostleship was the compilation of holy scripture of Sikh faith. This is known as the *Granth* or *Adi Granth.* Reverently it is called *Granth Sahib* or *Guru Granth Sahib.* This word *Granth* comes from the Sanskrit, and like the *Bible* and the *Koran* means a book — the Book *par excellence.* The *Granth* is a unique religious scripture. It is made up exclusively of the devotional hymns and philosophical-mystical poems composed by the Gurus, by some holy men of medieval India, known as bhaktas and by a few bards, whose compositions were selected by Guru Arjan Dev for inclusion in the holy book. In this work, which must have involved great labour of search for the sacred literature of medieval India, voicing principles in consonance with the ideals preached by Guru Nanak, and selecting what was to be included, the Guru was assisted by a great scholar-devotee, Bhai Gurdas. The text was completed in 1604, and the Book was installed inside the Hari Mandir to be reverently read out to the worshippers. Among those besides the Gurus, whose compositions have found a place in its pages, are Kabir, Namdev and Ravidas, men held to be low-caste, Sheikh Farid and Sheikh Bhikhan, Muslim sufis, the Brahmins Jaidev, Ramanand and Trilochan, besides a few others. The *Granth* contains sublime hymns of devotion, of spiritual quest and joy in God.

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In the time of Guru Arjan's apostleship, by the very nature of the historical forces then prevalent, the Sikh faith had to face persecution at the hands of Mughal imperial power. It appears that Jahangir, who succeeded Akbar on the throne in 1605, was excessively under the influence of fanatical Muslim divines, who had chafed under Akbar's state policy of religious peace and tolerance. While they dared not preach revolt, they looked upon Akbar's implied or open reverence for all faiths as an un-Islamic act, and desired to reverse his religious policy. One of the first victims of his newfound zeal for serving Islam was the holy Guru Arjan; against whom some kind of charge was trumped up, and he was accused, moreover, of 'misguiding many people, including Muslims'. Jahangir ordered Guru Arjan to be arrested, tortured and executed, and his property to be confiscated. Besides, his family was to be kept in custody. Guru Arjan was tortured barbarously and executed at Lahore in June, 1606.

AFTER GURU ARJAN DEV

Guru Hargobind

Guru Arjan's successor, Guru Hargobind (1595-1644), was only eleven or twelve when his holy father was put to death at Lahore. Knowing fully well that the church, of which he was the head, was under the severe displeasure of the rulers, he felt that the time had come for a new orientation to be given to the tenor of life of its followers. From being solely devotees, which by and large they had so far been, he resolved also to put the sword into their hands to defend the faith against tyranny. Everyone was deeply moved at the cruel and unjust execution of one so pure and holy as Guru Arjan, and a militant temper grew in the community. Guru Hargobind lived in regal style, contrary to the style of his predecessors, who lived in an aura of austerity. Guru Hargobind girded on two swords, symbolizing the spiritual quest and the crusading power, maintained troops and sat on a seat that was called a 'throne', *Akal Takht,* the Immortal Throne.

Guru Tegh Bahadur

A reliable Sikh tradition says that Guru Tegh Bahadur (1623-1675), the ninth occupant of Guru Nanak's holy seat, felt it his duty to stem this tide of persecution, which was directed mainly against the Hindu population. Hinduism in this context should be interpreted not to represent any particular sect or mode of worship, but the entire culture, spiritual values and way of life that were Indian-born and had been part of Indian history and culture for millennia. What Aurangzeb aimed at was to make India into a land like Iran, Iraq, Egypt or any other such country, where all vestiges of ancient cultures had been obliterated by the rising tide of Islamic conquest.

Guru Tegh Bahadur, viewing with deep anguish the tyranny let loose all over the land, set out on a mission to steel the people in their resolve

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to adhere to their cherished spiritual values, their *dharma,* and possibly to plead with the Emperor to treat the various classes of his subjects with justice. He was, however, arrested, arraigned before a court of Muslim divines as a rebel and enemy of Islam, and offered, as was usual in such cases, the choice between embracing Islam and death. The Guru naturally refused to apostate himself and in a craven manner to save his own life. He was beheaded after being tortured in the Chandni Chowk of Delhi, at a stone's throw from the Red Fort, the royal residence. At the spot of his martyrdom, which was then the Kotwali or prison, stands now a magnificent Sikh monument, the Sis-ganj Gurdwara. About his martyrdom, writing later, his son and successor, Guru Gobind Singh recorded:

The master protected the Hindus' paste-mark and sacred thread —
Performing in the Kali Age a mighty heroic deed.
To cherish God's devotees he performed the supreme sacrifice;
Gave up his head, but not his passion for righteousness.

GURU GOBIND SINGH

Guru Tegh Bahadur's son, who came to be known as Guru Gobind Singh, was only nine years old at the time of his father's martyrdom. He was born at Patna, where at his birth-place a magnificent Gurdwara has been erected.

It was while Guru Gobind Singh was at Anandpur that his holy father offered himself for martyrdom. The severed head of Guru Tegh Bahadur was brought by a devotee at great danger to himself from Delhi, and was cremated at Anandpur with reverence and due ceremony. At this time of crisis, the responsibility for guiding the destinies of the Sikh people fell upon the shoulders of a young boy of nine. But he was no common lad. Being divinely-inspired, and with the whole tradition of faith and moral responsibility from Guru Nanak's time onwards to guide him, he soon addressed himself to the task of infusing courage and a new hope into his followers, terrorized as they were by the repression let loose by functionaries of Aurangzeb.

Under the advice of some devoted elders, the young Guru moved from Anandpur to another place at the foot of the hills, on a bend of the Jamuna. This is a highly picturesque spot, and the place that the Guru selected for his residence came to be known as *paonta* or foot-rest. Here a fine Gurdwara along with a complex of splendid buildings now stands. At Paonta, where the Guru may have spent more than ten years of his life, he built up an organization based on devotion to the Guru's house among Sikhs of the Punjab. Here he collected around himself a considerable force, aiming some day to raise the people to resist the tyranny of the Mughals before which the country lay helpless. The hill chiefs of the neighbouring areas, becoming jealous of the Guru's growing power which they mistakenly looked upon as a challenge to themselves, formed a league against him. Led by Fateh Shah and Hari Chand, two chiefs, they attacked the Guru's centre at Paonta. A battle was fought a short distance away at

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Bhangani, in which the Guru won a victory. After this battle, the Guru moved back to Anandpur, which he fortified and where he resided for the next fifteen years.

THE KHALSA

Guru Gobind Singh had long been meditating the situation fast developing around him. Being a God-inspired man, he was confident that God, the last refuge of the humble, would Himself show the way to end the fear and helplessness that had gripped the people and end the tyranny of the rulers who were bigoted and arrogant. As the inspiration came to him on the Baisakhi day of 1699, a day when annually the Sikhs in large numbers assembled at Anandpur to have a sight of the Guru, he took one of those steps which change the course of history. To the large assembly that had gathered at his centre of Keshgarh from all over the country, he announced that he needed five men who would be willing to surrender their heads to him. Sword in hand, with undaunted courage, he waited for an answer. After a pause first one and then another, five men offered themselves. These were the first entrants to the Guru's new order, the *Khalsa,* Pure, the Guru's own. The five who had volunteered for sacrifice were embraced by the Guru and they enjoy the primacy of mention in the Sikh daily prayer as *Panj Pyare,* the five beloved ones of the Guru.

With these five as pioneers, thousands more came forward to join the Guru's new order of the Khalsa. The five who came forward first and the thousands after them were initiated into the new order with a ceremonial initiation with the dagger, called *amrit* or *Khanda-pahul.* This was done by administering to the initiates water stirred ritually with a dagger in an iron bowl, sanctified by the holy texts being recited over it. This had the effect of imbuing the new entrants into the order with the spirit of a new awakening to hold their lives in trust for the Guru's ideals. A new code was announced, in which the accent was on strict moral rectitude, heroism, and discipline. In the new order, each person was to look upon every other as a brother, caste distinctions stood completely abolished. All were to bear as the second part of their name the suffix 'Singh', lion. The code included the 'five K's' —*Kesh,* long unshorn hair, *Kara,* iron bracelet, *Kachh,* drawers, *Kangha,* comb and *Kirpan,* sword. This discipline was made obligatory and is observed by all Sikhs till this day.

This new order initiated by Guru Gobind Singh fired the whole Punjab countryside, and indeed wherever Sikhs lived, with a new zeal not only to live the teachings contained in the *Holy Granth,* but also to assume a martial aspect and fight, if need be, for the defence of their faith, their honour and their hearths and homes. The new order fired the followers of the Guru with a zeal for crusading for the defence of their faith, which they felt was being menaced by the Mughal rulers and their minions.

The Guru's new order naturally alarmed the neighbouring hill chiefs, who had already fought fairly long-drawn-out battles with the Guru. These

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chiefs also now brought into the struggle the Mughal authorities, who had viewed the growing strength and fighting temper of the Guru's followers with suspicion and anxiety. In order to curb the Guru's power, an army marched on his stronghold of Anandpur. Considering the number of assailants and those of the besieged, it was an unequal fight. After a heroic struggle of several days, the Guru's side decided to evacuate Anandpur. They knew this battle was lost, but the spirit would survive. The Guru's family separated from him some miles outside Anandpur and was sent to find places of safety. His two elder sons, Sahibzadas Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, were with him. The two younger sons, accompanied by a family employee and the Guru's aged mother, set out in another direction.

The Guru was pursued by a column sent after him by Wazir Khan, Subedar of Sirhind, which then was a fortified Mughal centre. With a few men, the Guru shut himself up in a house in the village of Chamkaur, where again a siege was laid. Here the Guru lost his two sons who were accompanying him, along with several of his brave followers. On solemn adjuration of the survivors, who urged him to save his life to carry on the struggle against the Mughals, the Guru left the place. He wandered in extreme suffering, and on one occasion was given shelter by two Muslim admirers, who held him in great reverence. Travelling through Rupar, Machhiwara, parts of present Ludhiana district, he made his way towards the areas in present Faridkot, Bhatinda and Ferozepur districts, which, being surrounded by thickets and scanty water supply, were not usually penetrated by the Mughal soldiery. In the meantime a tragic incident occurred at Sirhind. The Guru's two younger children, aged nine and seven, betrayed to the Subedar of Sirhind, were done to death by his order. This callous murder of these two children who, according to Sikh tradition, refused to be apostated, deeply stirred the conscience of the Sikh people everywhere, and is to this day observed as a solemn day of remembrance, recalling this tragedy. The Subedar had, only a few years later, to bear the consequences of his brutality in the form of complete sack of Sirhind and the massacre of his courtiers and adherents.

The Guru found some respite at a place called Sabo-ki-Talwandi, now known as Damdama Sahib, in Bhatinda district. Here he attended to the organizational work of the new nation-group that he had brought into being, and strengthened the consolidation of the Khalsa. At this time, the Guru evidently formed the resolve to travel where the aged Aurangzeb was in those years campaigning, to meet him and to bring to his notice the acts of high-handedness and tyranny of his officers, particularly the Subedar of Sirhind. While starting off, he sent to the Emperor an epistle in Persian, known to Sikh history as *Zafar-Namah,* epistle of victory. The very title is expressive of the Guru's unbounded faith in God. In this epistle, the Guru has pointed out to the Emperor that he had no aggressive designs, that he was no rebel or seeker after territory, but had had recourse to the sword only when no alternative was left. In a famous couplet the Guru wrote:

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When all other resources fail,
Legitimate it is to have recourse to the sword.

The Guru travelled to the south, passing through Rajasthan, but as he reached the Deccan, news reached him of Aurangzeb's death. Now the usual war of succession started among Aurangzeb's sons, and it appears the Guru helped the eldest, prince Muazzam, who had several years earlier interceded on behalf of the Guru, knowing him to be a man of God, and dispersed the hill chiefs from Anandpur. Muazzam came out victorious, and ascended the throne with the title of Bahadur Shah. The new ruler honoured the Guru, and sent him valuable presents.

On the bank of the Godavari, he met a Bairagi Sadhu, a Rajput from Rajouri in the Jammu area. This man, whose monastic name was Madho Das, immediately realized by his spiritual insight as he set eyes on the Guru, that here was the Master his soul had been yearning for and seeking. So he fell at the Guru's feet and said, 'I am thy *banda,* slave.' The Guru was impressed with his gifts of striking personality and bravery, and he came to be known as Banda. Later, because of his conquests in the Punjab, he was called by the people Banda Bahadur, the Hero. On conversion to Sikhism, he took the name Gurbakhsh Singh. Guru Gobind Singh blessed Banda, and sent him up North with five arrows from his quiver as a mark of his blessing. He charged him with the mission of uprooting tyrants, a charge which he amply fulfilled.

Soon after in 1708 Guru Gobind Singh was stabbed by two Pathans who were sent by Wazir Khan, Subedar of Sirhind, the murderer of the Guru's two children. The Emperor, Bahadur Shah, sent surgeons to treat the Guru's wound. But the injury proved fatal. Guru Gobind Singh cast off his mortal coil on the 5th of the bright half of Kartik in 1765 Samvat (1708) at Nanded, on the Godavari, where now is situated one of the Takhts or centres of Sikh spiritual authority. The place is reverently known as Abchal Nagar Huzoor Sahib, the City Immortal, the Holy Court. Before passing away, the Guru charged the Khalsa to consider itself to be the Guru's own embodiment. Wherever five Sikhs with pure hearts seeking the Guru's guidance would invoke his help, he would be present in their midst. In this sense the Khalsa, assembled for holy purposes, would be the Guru for the future. Further, the *Adi Granth,* in which the holy teachings of the preceding Gurus are recorded, would be treated as the Guru. Its word or *Bani* consisting in purity of heart and the spirit of holy quest, would serve as an oracle and guide the holy assembly, the *sangat.* Thus, the personal Guruship, that had so far been the guiding light of the Sikhs, stood abolished.

AFTER GURU GOBIND SINGH

Banda Bahadur

After Guru Gobind Singh, Banda, his successor who had come to the Punjab, raised his standard in areas comprising the Punjabi-speaking

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regions of Ambala and Patiala. The Sikh peasantry and the Punjab countryside in general, long oppressed by the Mughal rulers, flocked to his standard and Banda won brilliant and hard-fought victories at Chhat, Banur, Sadhura and later at Sirhind. In the battle for Sirhind fought at Chapar Chiri in 1709-10, the tyrant Subedar Wazir Khan died fighting and his army was routed. Banda caused the evil-doers of Sirhind to be duly punished. Sirhind, the scene of the murder of the Guru's innocent children, was sacked.

Banda's career as a foe of the Mughal empire lasted until 1716, with a kind of seesaw struggle. He fought, and when hard-pressed, disappeared. Then again he appeared and fought, till in the fort of Gurdas Nangal, in the Majha area, he was besieged by a large army. At last, reduced to starvation, he was captured along with more than six hundred of his followers. The prisoners were marched to Delhi, where on the orders of Farrukhsiyar, who was on the throne, they were all beheaded, in groups of a hundred a day. On the last day, Banda himself was tortured and killed, his young son having been killed first. But Banda, with the heroic spirit infused into him by Guru Gobind Singh, bore all his suffering with exemplary courage.

The Khalsa Dal

The half century till 1765 was a period of Sikh persecution in the Punjab. During this time, when the Sikhs were largely treated as outlaws, there were battles between their bands and the Mughals. The Khalsa Dal was formed, which was a militia to fight the Mughals. The Sikhs were leading a roving life. Their places of worship were looked after by the Udasis, a sect founded by Baba Sri Chand, Guru Nanak's son, who had turned an ascetic.

Besides being hunted like animals and brought to Lahore in batches to be butchered, the Sikhs during this period fought two great actions — the Chhota, minor and the Wadda, major Ghallughara. The first of these actions was fought in 1746 against Diwan Lakhpat Rai, the haughty commander of Mir Mannu, Subedar of Lahore. He hunted the Sikhs in the jungle areas around Lahore, but ultimately they captured him and he was duly punished. The Wadda Ghallughara was fought against a powerful foe. The Afghan ruler, Ahmad Shah Abdali, after defeating a large Maratha army at Panipat in 1761, thought of finishing off the Sikhs, who he realized were the main obstacle in the way of his domination of the Punjab. He, therefore, invaded the Malwa area, home of the Sikhs, with a large force in 1762. This is the area now comprising the districts of Sangrur and Ludhiana. The Sikhs, to escape total massacre, gathered in force under the command of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Sardar Charhat Singh Sukarchakkia. With their women and children placed on carts in the middle, the menfolk fought a running battle for a long distance, and pushed towards the area called the Jungle, comprising the present Bhatinda and Feroze-

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pore districts. Thirty thousand Sikhs were killed in this campaign in a bid to exterminate the enemy.

Emerging from their hide-outs after Ahmed Shah's return to Kabul, the Sikhs established themselves in the form of a commonwealth composed of twelve clan chiefships, called *misals.* Their rule extended from the Jhelum to beyond the Ghaggar, in present-day Haryana. They reversed the tide of invasions from the north-west, uprooted Mughal and Pathan rule, and established peace. Some Muslim principalities survived, which were later on conquered by Ranjit Singh in the nineteenth century.

Ranjit Singh

Ranjit Singh, grandson of Sardar Charhat Singh, hero of the Ghallughara came to occupy the throne of Lahore in 1799 and assumed the title of Maharaja which at that time was a rare distinction for a ruler. He reigned for forty years, his kingdom comprising the entire Punjab west of the Sutlej, Jammu and Kashmir, a large area in present Himachal Pradesh and the North-Western Frontier Province of present-day Pakistan. Under his rule Punjab prospered, and became a power to reckon with. His rule was tolerant and he was one of the most popular monarchs that India has produced. After his death in 1839, a succession of politically incompetent princes came to the throne; there were palace intrigues and betrayals and, finally, after a hard struggle, Ranjit Singh's kingdom fell into British hands. Thus,in 1849 the Sikhs, liberators of Punjab, ceased to be an independent power. During the days of British rule and since Independence, however, they have participated splendidly in all spheres of national development. They have proved to be politically a very wide-awake section of the Indian people, and have made sacrifices in the patriotic struggle far beyond their proportion in the country's population.

CONCLUSION

The Sikh religion during the five hundred years of its existence has played a significant role in the history of India as a liberating influence, as has been briefly indicated in the foregoing pages. Its influence as a spiritual force has been no less remarkable. It raised the human consciousness to the highest pinnacle of spirituality by inculcating devotion to the Sole Supreme Being (Ek Onkar) in terms going back to the founts of the spiritual thought of India. That way it became a binding force and tended to eliminate sectarianism. As between the two great traditions, Hinduism and Islam, it sought to create a bridge of understanding, tolerance and goodwill. In ages before modern humanistic thought penetrated to India, it championed the abolition of untouchability and caste distinctions of high and low by birth. It pleaded for a better status for women. Even more significant was its synthesis of spirituality and action. That way it brought back the ancient wisdom of the *Gita* to the masses. It has thus exercised a great enlightening influence.

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Last may be mentioned its role in bringing spiritual light to the common masses, in the simple everyday language that they could follow. While the learned of various faiths used classical languages which were sealed books to the people to contradict one another, it was Guru Nanak and his successors who brought spirituality and sweetness to the millions, thus conferring on them *mukti*. Their message also helped inspire the masses to liberate themselves from the age-old yoke of tyrants.

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The Scriptures

This world is like a tree:
On it rest at night a large number of birds.
These birds live through pleasure and suffering,
And gripped by Maya's stupor in the end die.
As night passes and day dawns,they again fly skyward,
Wandering in all directions as their actions impel them.

Guru Nanak Gauri 1-6

One who claims to be a saint,
And goes about begging—
Touch not his feet.
He whose livelihood is earned through work,
And part given away in charity—
Such one, Nanak! truly knows the way to God.

Guru Nanak Sarang-Ki-Var 22

On the unending, immeasurable path of death,
Devotion to God is man's sure provision;
On that frightening path, obscured by smoke and dust,
Devotion to God is the source of light.
On the path where friend thou hast none,
Devotion to God is thy true helper
On that way where terrible heat will oppress thee,
Devotion to God will give thee cooling shade.
There where unbearable thirst will suffocate thee,
Saith Nanak: God's Name showers joyful amrita.

Guru Arjan Dev Sukhmani 4.2

Man is involved with a vast variety of delicacies
As is an animal;
Like a thief he is bound with things of attachment;
The body unsanctified through holy company is like a corpse,
Tattered through births and deaths innumerable:
This corpse clad in fine vesture,
Is no better than a scarecrow causing fright in a field.
All else to some use may be put,
The Godless man is the most worthless of all.
Saith Nanak: One on whom God's grace falls
Engages in meditation on Him in holy company.

Guru Arjan Raga Gauri 124

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Make compassion the cotton, contentment the yarn;
Give it chastity's twist and knot:
Such is the true thread of the self.
Put such a one on me, thou Brahmin, shouldst thou have it
Such thread will neither snap nor be spoiled:
Neither burn nor be lost.
Blessed, O Nanak, are those who wear round their neck such a thread.
Guru Nanak Varba 15

One lowliest of the lowly, spurned by all.
By devotion to God's Name
In all four directions shall be honoured.
Beloved Lord! I seek a sight of Thee.
All who served Thee have attained liberation.
One who served Thee have attained liberation.
One whose very touch all avoid,
Through devotion, becomes deeply venerated.
One who is reckoned utterly worthless,
Through grace of the holy becomes an object of worship.
In holy company the mind asleep is awakened,
And love of the Lord's Name is aroused.
Guru Arjan Dev Asa 63

Neglecting devotion to God, hast thou made waste of thy life;
Saith Nanak: My self, in love devote thyself to God:
as is the fish devoted to water.
Why art thou enamoured of evil courses?
Even for a moment hast thou not turned away
from these.
Saith Nanak: My self! in love devote thyself to God:
And thus escape Yama's noose.
Youth is past; old age has at last come over this body.
Saith Nanak: My self! in love devote thyself to God:
Thy allotted span is coming to a close.
Even in old age thy eyes still closed.
The hour of death is at hand.
Saith Nanak: Man, maddened by desires,
Why art thou indifferent to God?
Wealth, woman, status—all that thou takest to be thine—
Believe the word of Nanak—None shall abide with thee.
Guru Tegh Bahadur Slokas

Humility is my mace;
Touching the dust on the feet of all is my spear;
These weapons no evil-doer can withstand.
The Perfect Master has equipped me with these.
Guru Arjan Dev Sorath 80

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Festivals

Baisakhi (April): The Indian New Year's day is not only the harvesting festival, but also recalls Guru Gobind Singh's founding of the Khalsa order.

Guru Arjan's Martyrdom (June): This commemorates the martyrdom of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, who was killed on the orders of Jahangir, who objected to his missionary work. Guru Arjan built the Golden Temple at Amritsar and compiled the *Granth Sahib*, the scripture of the Sikh faith.

Diwali (October or November): The Sikhs celebrate the festival of lights as the day on which Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, reached Amritsar on his release from captivity. A firework display at the Golden Temple in Amritsar marks the occasion.

Guru Nanak's Birth Anniversary (November): This is one of the two principal Sikh festivals. On this day, religious assemblies are held and discourses delivered. The principal places of celebrations are at Nankana Sahib, Guru Nanak's birthplace in Pakistan, and in Amritsar.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's Martyrdom (November or December): This commemorates the martyrdom of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, who was beheaded in 1675 by Aurangzeb, who wanted to suppress all religious activity of non-Muslims.

The Martyrdom of the Sahibzadas (December): The observance of the martyrdom of the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh recalls the entombing alive by the Mughal subedar of Sirhind of these two children—nine and seven years old—as a reprisal for their father's fight against Mughal tyranny. This solemn occasion is commemorated near Sirhind in the Punjab at a place called Fatehgarh Sahib.

Guru Gobind Singh's Birth Anniversary (December or January): This anniversary shares equal importance with Guru Nanak's birthday as a principal event in the Sikh calendar. Guru Gobind Singh was the last of the Gurus and founded the Khalsa or the militant Sikh order.

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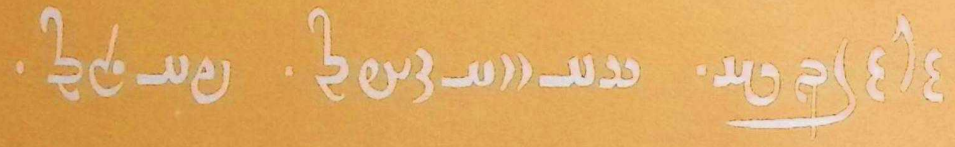

Righteous Paths of Bliss!

Yasna 43.3

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Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is the religion preached by the holy Prophet Zarathushtra or Zoroaster of ancient Iran. It was the religion of the ancient Iranian people, and at present it is professed and practised by a small community of Zoroastrians living in various countries of the world, particularly in India and Iran. The Zoroastrians are also known as Parsis, the residents of the ancient province of Pars in south-western Iran. The present Zoroastrian or Parsi community, living in India, Iran and elsewhere, is one of the smallest communities in the world. It is a remnant of the ancient Iranian people professing the Zoroastrian religion. In ancient times the Iranian people had come in cultural, commercial and political contact with many nations of the ancient world: the Hindus, the Chinese, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Israelites, the Arabs, the Greeks and the Romans. The present Zoroastrian community is descended from these Iranian people who flourished and played an important role in world history under the royal dynasties from the earliest times up to about the middle of the seventh century A.D.

THE ZOROASTRIAN COMMUNITY

After the Arab conquest of Iran and the downfall of the last Iranian empire of the Sassanians in 642, the Zoroastrian community dwindled, because a majority of the Zoroastrians of Iran were converted to Islam. A handful of the Zoroastrians remained faithful and stuck to their ancestral religion in spite of hardships and disabilities. A few of the Zoroastrians left Iran after the downfall of their empire on account of the unbearable conditions prevailing in Iran, and settled on the west coast of India. Later more Zoroastrians migrated in small groups from Iran to India.

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As stated at the outset, the Zoroastrian community is one of the smallest communities in the world. There are about 130,000 Zoroastrians in the whole world, and a great majority of them (about 100,000) live in India. Although scattered in the four corners of the country, they are concentrated mostly in Western India, in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Bombay is their main centre, and at present more than 70,000 Zoroastrians are living in that metropolis of India. They are living also in Iran and Pakistan. They travelled overseas and settled, although in very small numbers, in various countries of all the five continents of the world.

THE SCRIPTURES

The earliest Zoroastrian scripture is generally known as the *Avesta*. The Avesta contains the teachings, sermons and prayers composed by Zoroaster himself, and also by his disciples and followers. The Avesta is also the language in which it is composed. The language of the Avesta belongs to the east Iranian group of languages; it bears close affinity to the language of the Vedas. The Avesta and the Vedic languages are regarded as sister-languages; and they are closely related to each other in vocabulary, grammar, syntax, metre, and poetic diction. There are parallel and corresponding legends, myths, legendary figures, rites, thoughts, teachings, concepts, customs, and manners in the Avesta and the Vedas.

Besides the Avesta, the Zoroastrian scriptural texts were composed in Sassanian and post-Sassanian times in the language current in those days, generally known as Pahlavi — one of the middle Iranian languages. The Avesta texts were translated into Pahlavi and commentaries were added to the translations in Sassanian times. Another form of reading and writing Pahlavi is known as Pazand. The Pahlavi texts were transcribed into Pazand, and Pazand prayers were composed in Sassanian times, and some in post-Sassanian times. These Pazand prayers are recited by the Zoroastrians at present along with the Avesta prayers. Hence the Zoroastrian prayers and scriptures which have been preserved at present are composed in two languages — Avesta and Pahlavi-Pazand.

The Zoroastrian religious texts were composed in Pahlavi also in post-Sassanian times, particularly in the ninth century. In later centuries, the Avesta and Pahlavi texts were translated into modern Persian. The Zoroastrian priests of India studied Sanskrit. In or about the 12th century, the Avesta and Pahlavi texts were translated into Sanskrit by a priest named Neriosang Dhaval and into old Gujarati. Some pieces of Sanskrit translations were recited as prayers along with the Avesta and Pazand prayers.

The ancient Greek and Roman writers had come in contact with the Zoroastrians, and they have written profusely on Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism. The Zoroastrian scriptures attracted the attention of the European travellers who travelled to India and Iran in later centuries. The European scholars seriously studied the Zoroastrian scriptures during the period of the last two hundred years. The Zoroastrian texts were translated, and books of

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grammar, linguistics, history, religion, ceremonies and customs were published by them in all the important languages of Europe.

Extant Avesta Scripture

The extant Avesta scripture is only a small portion of the Avesta literature that was in existence in Sassanian times. It is estimated that only a fifth of the Sassanian Avesta is now in existence. The extant Avesta may be divided into five parts:

(1) The Yasna including the Gathas: Avesta *yasna* (Sanskrit *yagna)* generally signifies worship with ceremony and offerings. The Yasna consists of 72 chapters, which include 17 cantos of the Gathas.

Avesta *gatha* (Sanskrit *gatha)* means 'a song, a hymn, a divine song.' As the name implies, the Gathas are the divine songs and they are metrical compositions of Zoroaster himself. These are expressly stated to be five in number. The Gathas include the sacred prayers of Ahuna Vairya, Ashem Vohu, and Yenghe Hatam. The Avesta and Pahlavi names of the five Gathas with corresponding numbers of the cantos in Yasna are:

Avesta	Pahlavi	Cantos in Yasna
Ahunavaiti (the Will of Ahura)	Ahunavad	28-34
Ushtavaiti (the Gatha of Supreme Bliss—Ushta)	Ushtavad	43-46
Spenta Mainyu (the Holy Spirit)	Spentomad	47-50
Vohu Khshathra (the Good Kingdom)	Vahukhshthra	51
Vahishtoishti (Sovereign desire, the highest wish, the Gatha of fulfilment)	Vahishtoisht	53

(2) The Visparad: The Pahlavi word *visparad* is derived from the Avesta *vispe ratavo,* 'all spiritual lords'. The Visparad consists of 23 chapters. As the name implies, the Visparad has been composed in honour and invocation of spiritual lords presiding over the spiritual and material creations.

(3) The Videvdad: The Pahlavi word *videvdad* corresponds to Avesta *data vidaeva,* 'the law against the demons (evil spirits, evil forces)'. The Videvdad is one of the 21 Avesta books of the Sassanian times. In the present condition, it has 22 chapters. As the name implies, Videvdad is the religious law-book, and contains laws against visible and invisible impurities and evil forces. It contains also the laws of sanitation, hygiene and ritual purity. It is the code of ceremonial ablutions, penances and purifications.

(4) The Yashts: The Pahlavi word *yasht* is derived from Avesta *yeshti,* 'worship'. The Yashts are composed in honour and worship of God and

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spiritual beings. Each of the Yashts is dedicated individually to one of the divinities. At present there are 22 Yashts and fragments of some more Yashts now lost. The Nyaeshas are also hymns of praise in honour of God and spiritual beings. They are shorter than the Yashts.

An epic character and a poetic form are the distinguishing features of the Yashts. Important historical materials of the kings and heroes of the royal dynasties of ancient times and epic narrations and descriptions of the ancient times have been preserved in the Yashts.

(5) The Khordeh Avesta: The *Khordeh Avesta,* 'the smaller Avesta, the select pieces of Avesta', is the book of daily prayers of the Zoroastrians. The text may be regarded as constituting selections from the rest of the Avesta.

Sources

There are various sources, Iranian and foreign, for Zoroastrianism, as can be gleaned from what has been stated above. The Avesta is rightly regarded as the most important and most authentic source; and hence this monograph is based mainly on the Avesta scripture.

ZOROASTER

The personal name of the Prophet, as it appears in the Avesta, is Zarathushtra. In later speeches, it is Zartusht, Zardusht. In the ancient Greek and Roman writings, the name is variously written; but the most frequently occurring form in these writings is Zoroaster, which form is generally used in English and other European languages.

The generally known family name of the Prophet is Spitama. The family was known after Spitama, who was the ninth ancestor of the prophet. Hence the prophet is known in the Avesta as Zarathushtra, or Zarathushtra Spitama, or Spitama Zarathushtra.

Zoroaster's father was Pourushaspa and his mother Dughdhova, generally known as Dogdo. When Zoroaster was born, he smiled, which was due to the presence of the divine beings. At his birth, the country was filled with light. It was the light of divine glory (Avesta *khvarnah,* later *khvarreh, farreh),* and it proclaimed the birth of a prophet. The good creations of God became glad to see the divine light and they proclaimed blissfulness (Yasht 13.94). The evil and wicked persons, sorcerers and witches, were terrified to see the divine effulgence as they were apprehensive that the Prophet would put an end to their evil powers and baneful practices. They, therefore, made attempts to kill the babe Zoroaster. But the Prophet was divinely protected.

When Zoroaster was 20 years of age, he was divinely guided to a secluded place on *Mount Ushidarena* — 'the Mount holding divine intellect', also known as *Ushidam,* 'the abode of dawn, divine intellect.' He stayed in the mountain recesses for ten years, and dedicated himself to Almighty God and divine beings. There he devoted his time and energy to prayer, meditation, and communion with spiritual beings, and he received divine

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inspiration and the message of religion through the divine beings, particularly through Vahumanah (God Mind) and Sarosha (Inspiration).

At the age of 30, Zoroaster returned to his country, and preached his religion. In the initial stages, the Prophet had to struggle for spreading his message of religion, and he prayed to Almighty God for help.

The evil spirit ordered the demon of deceit to kill Zoroaster; and the demon rushed threateningly. Zoroaster chanted the holy prayer Ahunavar; and the demon fled, confessing utter defeat.

Zoroaster perceived in his mind that the demons were plotting his death. Undaunted he stood firmly and went ahead with his spiritual weapon of the holy word, the Manthra (Vedic, Mantra). He proclaimed that he would fight the evil spirit with his spiritual weapons, the excellent spiritual weapons received by him from Almighty God.

Realising its helplessness, the evil spirit tried to pacify and win over the Prophet by offering kingship as a bribe for renouncing his religion. Rejecting the offer, Zoroaster firmly replied: 'Never shall I renounce the Good Religion — not even if my body, life, and consciousness would tear asunder' (Videvdad 19.1-10).

By the grace of God, Zoroaster triumphed. The first disciple of the Prophet was Maidyomah, or Maidhyomaongha, who is mentioned in the Avesta as one who was the first to listen to the holy word and commandments of Zoroaster (Yasht 13.95). Among the early disciples of the Prophet may be mentioned Asmokhanvant, Saena, Isatvastra, Urvatatnara, Hvarechitra, and others who are mentioned in the memorial list of the Avesta (Yasht 13.96-98).

Zoroaster preached his religion in the court of King Vishtasp. After intellectual discussions and spiritual experiences, King Vishtasp recognized Zoroaster as the true prophet of Almighty God; and he became the patron-king of Zoroaster (Yasna 46.14; Yasht 13.99). The King and his royal family, and the ministers of the court accepted the religion of Zoroaster. Later the religion of Zoroaster was accepted by the Iranian people.

Nothing has been stated directly or indirectly in the Avesta regarding the passing away of the Prophet. The special term used in Pahlavi for the passing away of the prophet is *vihez i zartusht,* 'rising up of Zoroaster, ascension of Zoroaster'. According to tradition, Zoroaster passed away at the age of 77 years and 11 days.

THE RELIGION OF MONOTHEISM

Ahura Mazda: Zoroastrianism recognizes Ahura Mazda 'the Wise Lord' as the sole creator and absolute ruler of all creations. The Avesta word *ahura* means 'lord of life', and *mazda* 'wise, all-knowing, omniscient'. Ahura Mazda (later Ohrmazd, Hormazd) is the creator of the spiritual and material worlds and of all creations and creatures therein. He has fixed the laws of Nature.

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and all creations are working according to these laws. He is the most beneficent spirit, and a spirit even among the spirits. By his thought-force he first filled the heavenly realms with light. The blazing sun, the highest and brightest light visible to us, is regarded as the most beautiful emblem of Ahura Mazda. The red blazing fire is regarded as 'the son' or representative of Ahura Mazda in this world.

Ahura Mazda is wise and omniscient. He is observing and watching over all creations and creatures with his sharp piercing gaze. He is most mindful of the plans which have been and which shall be wrought by men in this life. Ahura Mazda is the sole decider, and he is the supreme judge of the actions done by men in this life.

Amesha Spentas: Ahura Mazda has created Amesha Spentas, 'the Beneficent Immortals' and Yazatas, 'Worshipful Beings'. Avesta *yazata* is the general term for spiritual beings, angels; and chief among them are the seven Amesha Spentas, 'beneficent immortals, archangels'. Ahura Mazda is their father and preceptor. The Amesha Spentas are working in the universe with one accord and united action.

The Amesha Spentas preside over spiritual powers, virtues and qualities, and also over material creations.

Yazatas: Avesta *yazata* (later *yazad, izad*), 'worshipful being', is the general term for the spiritual beings created by Ahura Mazda. They are spiritually working in the universe as co-workers or associates of Amesha Spentas, and they are presiding over spiritual and material creations. There are Yazatas presiding over the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, fire and other creations of the earth. When the Zoroastrians recite prayers standing before these created beings, they offer prayers to the Yazatas presiding over these creations, and through them they send their prayers and thought to Ahura Mazda.

Zoroastrianism recognises the mental, spiritual world: *manahya, mainyava* 'mental, spiritual', and also the material, physical world: *gaethya* 'living', also *astvat* 'bodily, physical'. As the Avesta world indicates, the mental, spiritual world is that about which only we can think, and which we cannot see with our physical eyes and which we cannot touch or feel with our bodily organs. The material world or physical world is that in which we live, which we can see with our physical eyes and which we can touch and feel with our bodily organs.

The physical body of the creations of the world is made of earthly elements, but in this earthly body there are spiritual elements, spiritual powers of God. These spiritual powers are working in all living material creations. There are spiritual powers in all creations of Nature, and it is on account of these spiritual powers that the material creations can live.

Two Spirits

Zoroastrianism recognizes two spirits. They are always working in

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this material world. One is *spenta mainyu,* 'the spirit of growth, progress', and the other is *angra mainyu,* 'the spirit of decrease, destruction'. These two spirits are two opposing forces always at work in Nature. This philosophy of two spirits is at times misunderstood as theological dualism, which it is not. This is the principle of positive and negative forces of Nature, and also of good and evil in this world. This is, therefore, physical and ethical dualism, and not theological dualism, as it is at times mistakenly interpreted and understood.

According to Zoroastrianism, the human body is made of earthly elements, but in this earthly body there are spiritual elements, spiritual powers of God, without which man cannot live. Among the spiritual elements of man, his soul is most important, because the soul is the spiritual self of man. The Avesta word for 'soul' is *urvan,* which may be translated as 'the chooser'. Man is free to choose either of the two paths: the good path of truth, virtue, industry, service and philanthropy, or the evil path of falsehood, vices, slothfulness, selfishness and wickedness. But a stern warning has been sounded in explicit terms:

> **Man shall have to reap the harvest as he sows:**
> **man shall enjoy the fruits of his action:**
> **good for goodness, and evil for wickedness.**
> **Man shall have to suffer the consequences of his actions in this life.**
> **Hence the soul is responsible for his actions in this life. (Yasna 30.3-6)**

Avesta *fravashi,* 'faith, inspiration', is the angelic guardian spirit of man, a constant companion of the soul in this life. The Fravashi accompanies the soul, and guides and inspires man in this life to be good and virtuous, and to lead a pious, industrious and benevolent life. The Fravashi, therefore, is a friend, philosopher and guide to the soul in this life, but the soul is free to accept or reject the advice and guidance of the Fravashi. Hence, although a constant companion of the soul in this life, the Fravashi is not responsible for the actions of man in this life.

The Zoroastrian belief of Fravashi corresponds to some extent to the Vedic *pitaras,* 'forefathers', and to Roman *manes,* 'the spirits of the departed ones'.

Human Life: A Blessing

Zoroastrianism teaches us that our life in this world is a blessing; it is a duty, and also a struggle. It is a blessing, because God has given us a beautiful body with physical, mental and spiritual powers. He has created all the wonderful creations of Nature, which maintain our life and without which we cannot live. Merciful God has so contrived that we can get from Nature everything that we require for maintaining our life, provided we earnestly work for the same. Every moment we receive the blessings of God in one way or another. The rays of the sun, the rains from the heavens, plants

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and trees growing from the earth, and many other visible and invisible currents of Nature — all these are blessings of Almighty God.

But our life is also a duty, according to Zoroastrianism. As human beings and as Zoroastrians, we have to do the duties of life: duty to God, duty to ourselves, and duty to others. God has given us our life and all good things of life. It is, therefore, our duty to remember Him and to thank Him by offering prayers, and by leading a virtuous and useful life. A prayer offered with a devoted, pure heart and a dedicated pure mind purifies our feelings, elevates us in our life, and leads us on the path of purity, goodness and duty (Yasna 58.1)

A Zoroastrian has to do his duty to himself. Our body is a sacred weapon of our soul in this life. It is through the body that the soul can perform the duties of this life. It is, therefore, our duty to keep our body clean, pure and healthy — in thought, word and deed. According to Zoroastrianism, health, vitality, endurance and long life are the blessings of God; and a Zoroastrian prays for the same, so that he can perform his duty and play his part well in this life.

A Zoroastrian has to do his duty to others — members of his family and his community, other citizens and countrymen, and the members of humanity at large. The creations of Nature in this world are interdependent, and they help and support one another. For maintenance of our life, we depend on other creations of Nature. Similarly, it is our religious duty to help and support our needy brethren according to our means and ability. We can help and serve others by our thought, word and deed. We can educate the unlearned, we can nurse the sick, and we can help the poor and needy. Charity is a religious duty of a Zoroastrian. Every Zoroastrian is enjoined to keep his feet, hands and intellect in readiness to do lawful and timely deeds, and to undo unlawful and untimely deeds (Visparad 15.1). According to Zoroastrian teachings, service to humanity is service to God.

According to Zoroastrianism life in this world is also a struggle, a fight against evil. A constant struggle is going on between the forces of good and those of evil. Every Zoroastrian is a soldier in this struggle, always fighting on the side of the forces of good — truth, virtue, service, against the forces of evil, against moral evil (falsehood, ignorance, vices) and also against physical evil (diseases, famine, hunger and natural calamities).

Virtues of a Zoroastrian Household

As depicted in the Avesta, an ideal Zoroastrian man or woman is one who observes the principles of purity, who is healthy in mind and body, who is advanced in good thought, good word, and good deed, who is working with a sincere and devoted heart, reciting the holy word of prayer, self-sacrificing, leading a good life of wisdom, and one who enriches the world by his good deeds.

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1. "Through the warmth of Thy fire, possessing strength of truth, that strength of good mind may come to me." *(Yasna 43.4)*. The Anjuman Atash Behram in Bombay is a fire-temple dedicated to the angel of victory.
Below Avesta on some events in the life of Zoroaster.

THE AVESTA

Divine Appointment of the Prophet. The holy word of prosperity did Ahura Mazda create in accord with Holiness—sweetness for the creation, for those craving (spiritual) nourishment! O Good Mind, who hath Thou, who shalt give both for men?
This one, here, is known to me, who alone heard the commandments—Zarathushtra of the family of the Spitam, who wishes for us and for Holiness to celebrate fulfilment—hence to grant him command of speech! *Yasna 29.7-8*

Birth of Zarathushtra. By whose (Zarathushtra's) birth and growth waters and plants rejoiced, . . . waters and plants grew, . . . all creations of Beneficent Spirit proclaimed greeting: Bliss! for us has been born the priest, who is Zarathushtra Spitama! *Fravardin Yasht 93-94*

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Inspiration and Revelation. Beneficent, then, did I consider Thee, O Mazda Ahura, when Good Mind came to me; when by Thy word I became learned! Thou hast instructed me about tribulation (of worldly life): Faith in men (is) for doing that which Thou toldest me (to be) the best!
Yasna 43.11

The First Disciple. Here do we revere the Guardian Spirit of Maidyamah, son of Arastya, who first listened to the holy word and commandments of Zarathushtra.
Fravardin Yasht 95

Patron-king of Zarathushtra. O Zarathushtra, who is thy holy friend for the great covenant, who seeks to celebrate?
Then, he is valiant Kava Vishtaspa! *Yasna 46.14*

Celebration of the wish of Zarathushtra. The best wish of Zarathushtra Spitama is celebrated, since Ahura Mazda shall grant him deserts on account of holiness—blissful life for all eternity, and to those who practise and learn the words and actions of his good Religion! *Yasna 53.1*

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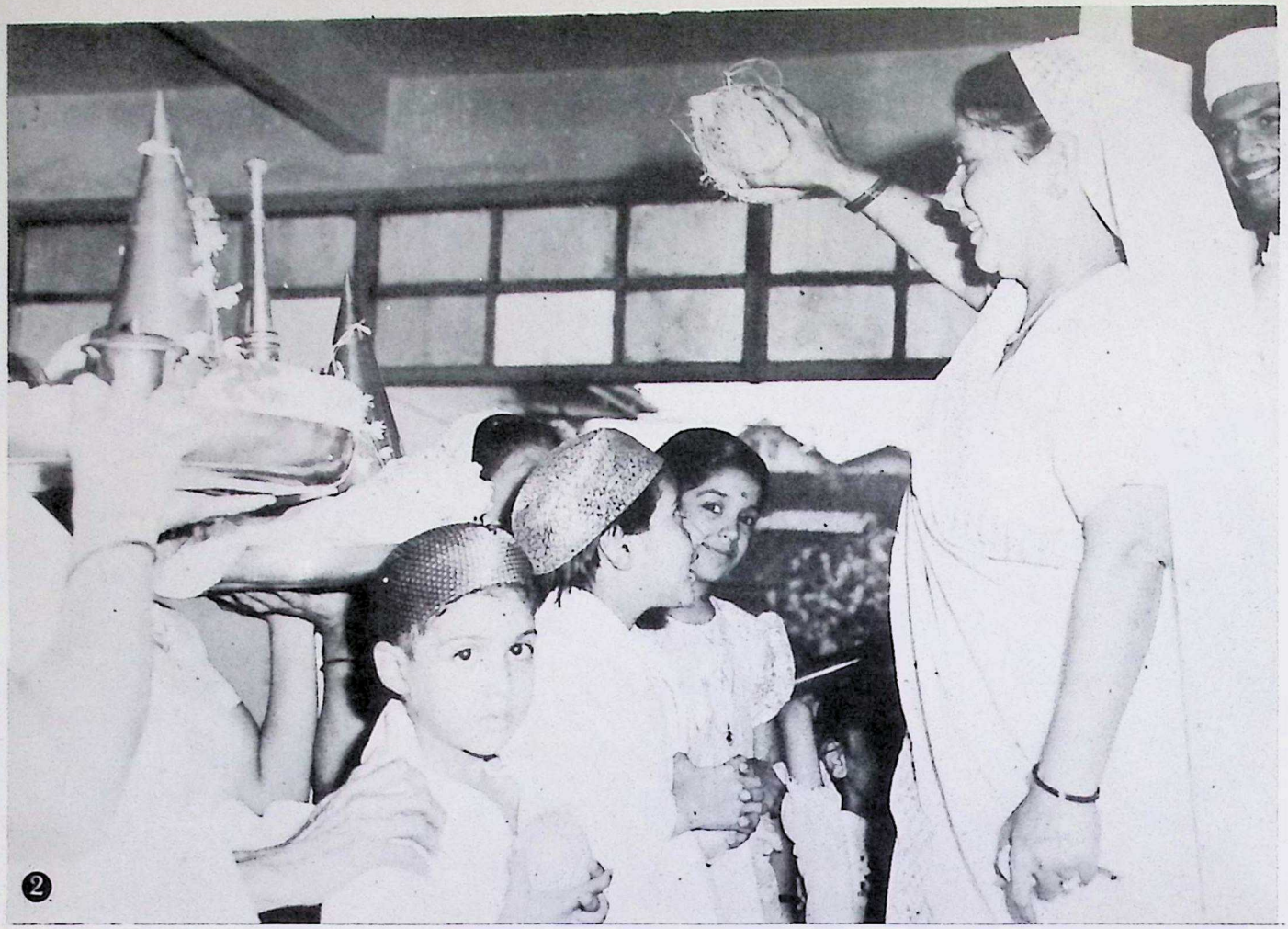

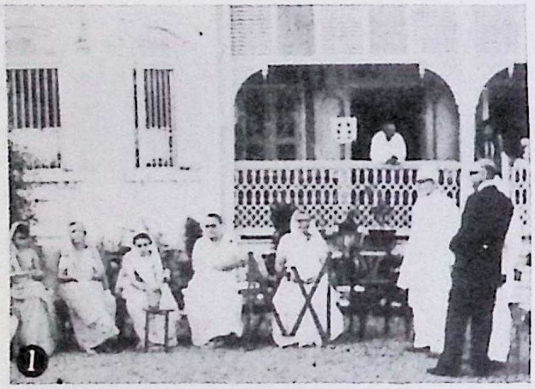

1. "I weave a song unto You, O Truth and O Good mind." *(Yasna 28.3)* Zoroastrian women weaving the *kushti* or the sacred belt or thread at Navasari.

2. Two Zoroastrian children are ceremoniously received by their mothers for the Navjot ceremony or initiation into the Zoroastrian religion.

3. Zoroastrian priests invest the two children with *sadro,* the sacred shirt, while reciting Avesta prayers.

4. "The sacred belt star-studded." *(Yasna 9.26).* A child is invested with *kushti* or sacred thread.

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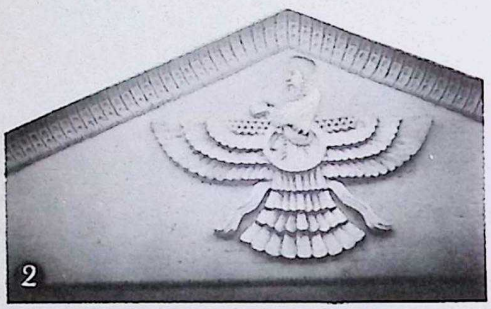

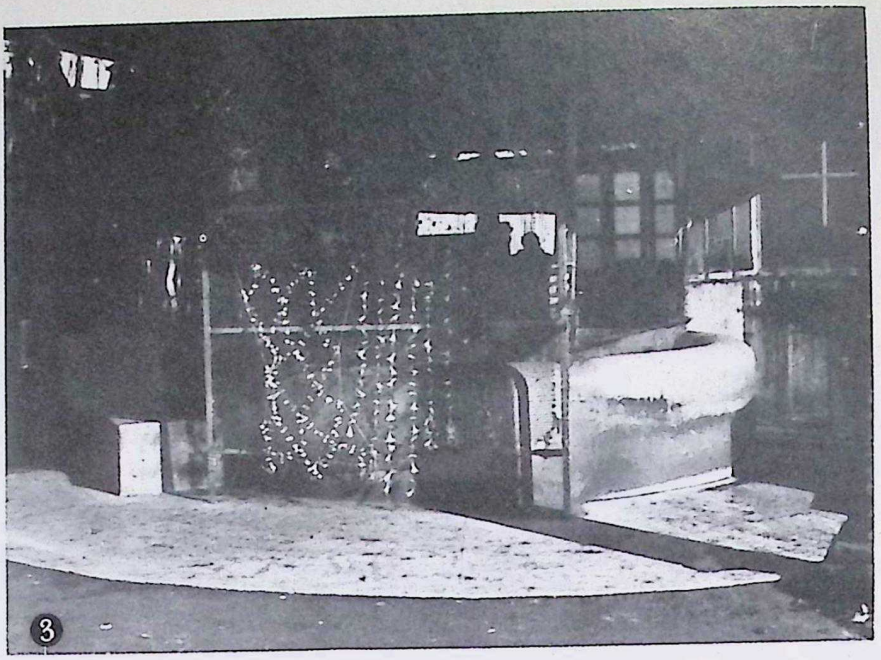

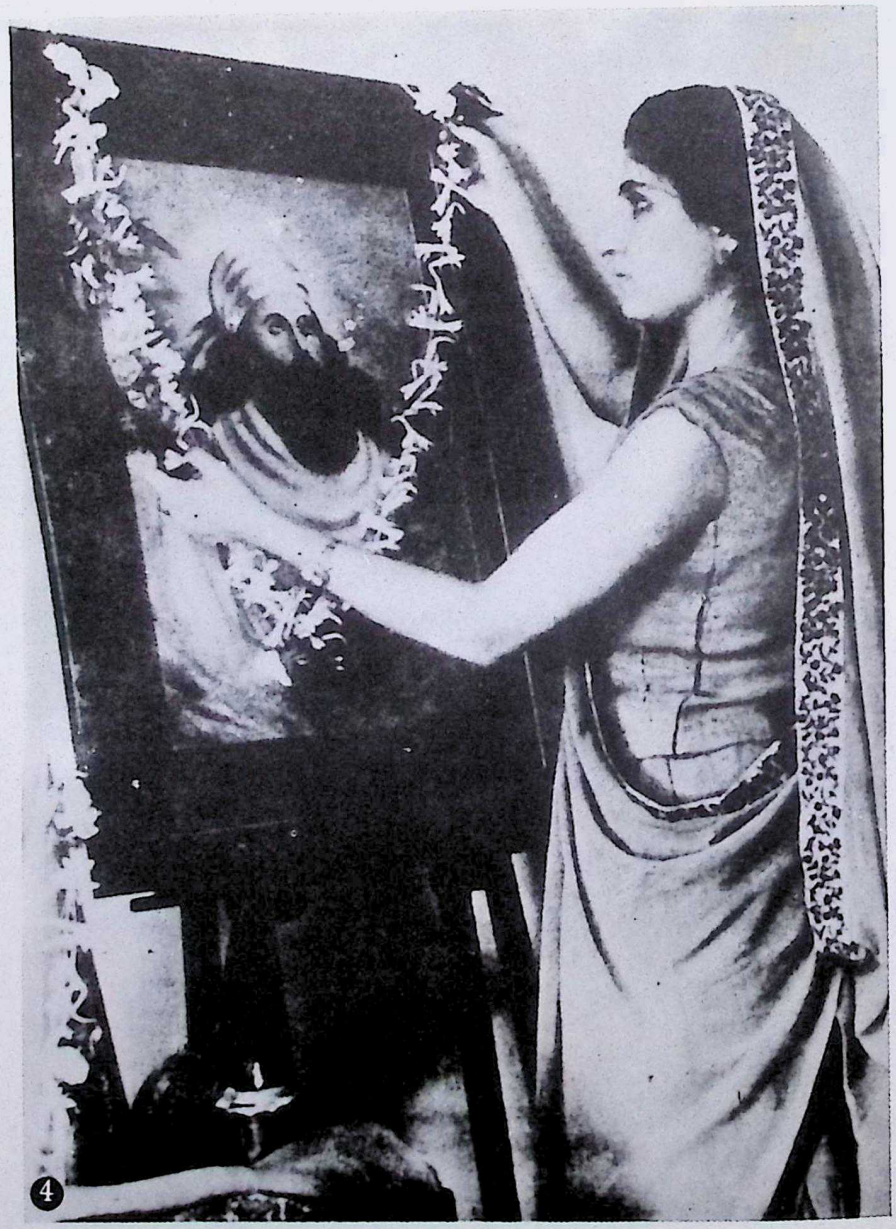

1. The bull-headed mace or club which is the insignia of religious authority. In Avesta it is the club of Mithra, the angel of truth and justice. The mace is usually kept in fire temples.

2. Zoroastrian figure of the powers of divinity. The disc stands for eternity, immortality, the wings for speed and three rows of overlapping feathers for good thought, good word and good deed.

3. Bombay's Bhikha Behram Well, popularly known as the Parsi Well. Zoroastrians offer prayers at this well to *Ardvi,* the angel presiding over water.

4. A Zoroastrian woman garlands the idealized portrait of Zoroaster. Near the portrait is a lamp, rose water, sweets, coconut and rice.

5. A specimen of Avesta-Pahlavi writing from the oldest extant manuscript of Avesta-Pahlavi *Yasna* written at Khambayat, Gujarat, in 1323. This manuscript is preserved in the Copenhagen Library in Denmark.

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قدیم ترین نسخه خطی اوستا وبند (یسنا) که درسال ۱۳۲۵ بقول گلدنر در سال ۱۳۲۳
بدست هیربد مهربان کیخسرو مهربان اسفندیار مهربان مرزبان بهرام نوشته شده است
الحق در کوپنهاگ موجود است

A SPECIMEN OF THE OLDEST MANUSCRIPT OF THE YASNA, K5, COPENHAGEN LIBRARY.

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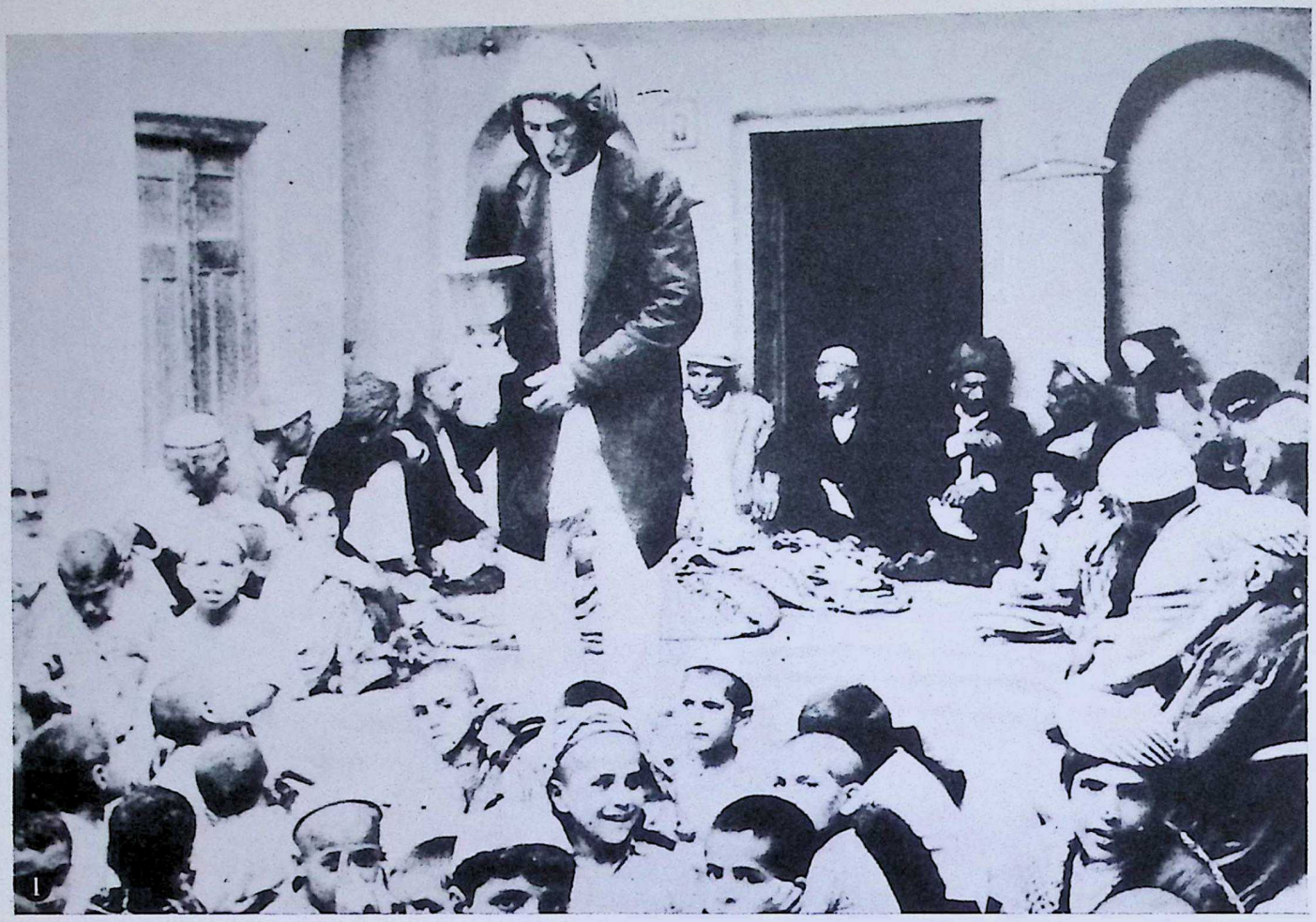

1. Zoroastrians of Iran observe the Jashan ceremony with a feast.

2. A Jashan ceremony in Bombay with the priest and his assistants standing around a fire and offerings of fruit, flowers, water, milk and sweets. The priest is wearing a mouth veil so that his breath does not come in contact with fire and offerings.

3. Zoroastrian children holding twigs of the haoma plant which grows in Iran and Afghanistan.

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Zoroastrianism inculcates the active virtues of life. It is the duty of a Zoroastrian to lead a good life of virtue and industry, and to find spiritual happiness in such a virtuous life; and also to teach and instruct others to lead a similar life. To be good and happy is essential, but that is not enough. We have to be good, virtuous and happy, and also to make others good, virtuous and happy.

Zoroastrianism teaches dignity of labour. To till and cultivate land 'with the left hand and the right, and with the right hand and the left', and to grow corn, is as good as to increase holiness. Work is worship, and idleness is a sin against religion and society. It is stated in the scripture that an idle man is a burden to human society, and he has to wander from door to door in search of food.

Thrift and economy are also the important virtues of Zoroastrian daily life. It is enjoined that one must not waste even a trifling thing. According to Videvdad 5.60:

> **Not, indeed, Ahura Mazda has given acquired property to waste,**
> **neither of full value nor even a trifle,**
> **as much as a spinster is rejecting (while spinning).**

While thrift, frugality and economy are virtues, stinginess and miserliness are vices. A charitable disposition is specially extolled. Such a disposition is an essential virtue of a Zoroastrian. The divine gifts of a Good Mind are specially meant for those who work for the welfare and uplift of the poor and the needy. It is specially enjoined in Visparad 15.1:

> **Let us here do good industry in order to make the needy unneedy.**

According to Zoroastrianism, marriage is a pious duty, and a married life is preferable to an unmarried life. It is incumbent on all able-bodied Zoroastrians to marry and to establish a happy home, where a husband and his wife may live happily with their children and the members of the family. A happy married life depends on virtue, duty and devotion to each other.

Catholicity and Civic Duties

According to Zoroastrianism, all good creations of the world are sacred creations of God. A Zoroastrian, in his daily prayers and also in religious ceremonies, pays homage to the spiritual beings, and respect to all human beings, good animals, and besides these also to places, fields, abodes, dwellings, water-stores, waters, lands, trees, and 'this earth and that sky', the atmosphere, the stars, the moon, the sun, and the endless lights (Yasna 1.16). The angels are promoting welfare and prosperity for the entire living world (Yasht 11.16, 21); and a Zoroastrian prays for the prosperity of the living worlds (Yasna 68.4).

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Similarly, all human beings are creations of God, and they deserve respect and good will from one another, and they should live in peace and amity among themselves. Ahura Mazda pours down rains so that 'man may eat corn, and (may grow) fodder for animals' (Videvdad 5.20). Similarly also in later prayers:

May goodness pour down from the sky,
may goodness grow from the earth.

In the Pazand prayer of repentance, a Zoroastrian repents for remissness, sin and crime, which he or she may have committed knowingly or unknowingly, in relation to his or her family members, other citizens and countrymen, and members of humanity:

If any sin has arisen by any unlawful conduct
towards (my) father, mother, sister, brother, wife,
child, husband, master, relatives, (also towards)
people of the world, partners, neighbours, countrymen,
(and) in relation to guest, and if I have been guilty
of the sin (committed) by (my) thought, word, deed,
by body, by soul, physically, spiritually, (then)
do I repent for it.

Do I repent for every kind of sin, . . . which might have
arisen in relation to God, in relation to mankind,
in relation to human species, all species. **(Patet 4, 8)**

Avesta Asha, Arta: Divine Cosmic Law

The Zoroastrian ethics, virtues and laws of purity are all indicated by one Avesta word: *asha, arta,* 'the divine cosmic law'. This technical term is interpreted by the popular and familiar Avesta words: *humata,* 'good thought', *hukhta,* 'good word', *hvarshta,* 'good deed'. The Avesta word asha connotes all virtues of life — truth, honesty, purity, devotion, industry, duty, liberality, goodness and benevolence.

The Avesta words asha, arta, are phonetic variants of one and the same word. This has been explained thus: 'Law, holy law, truth'. As a religious technical term: 'epitome of what is right and lawful; the divine dominion of truth, its order, holy eternal law, divine order'. In the Sanskrit translations of the Avesta, the words used are: *punyam, dharmah, punyatma, satya, satyavani.* From the Avesta *asha* is derived the Parsi Gujarati word *ashoi* 'holiness, piety, virtue, mental and physical purity'.

The Avesta word asha indicates the Zoroastrian path of life in accordance with the holy law of God. It is stated in the Avesta: 'One (is) the path, that (is) of asha, all others (are) no paths.' The Avesta asha or arta corresponds philologically and also semantically to Vedic *rita.* The Vedic term also indicates the path of life: *suga ritasya pantha,* 'good to tread (are) the paths of Rita.'

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SACRED EMBLEMS

The Shirt and Girdle

The sacred emblems of a Zoroastrian are *sadro,* 'sacred shirt', and *kushti,* 'sacred girdle'. In the initiation ceremony, a child — male or female — of Zoroastrian parents is ceremoniously invested with the sacred shirt and girdle. Since then he or she has to put on these sacred emblems throughout his or her life.

The sacred shirt and girdle are the religious implements of the Zoroastrians, and they protect them from evil influences and evil forces. The Avesta mentions the divine garment and divine belt of the spiritual beings, and the sacred shirt and girdle are representations of these spiritual garment and belt. The Avesta word *vastra,* meaning 'clothes, dress', is mentioned in the Avesta as spiritual garment of the angels; and the word sadro is derived from this Avesta word. The Avesta word for 'the sacred belt' is *aiwyaonhana,* 'a belt, a band'. The same Avesta word is used also for the starry belt of the firmament. It is used also for the belt of the spiritual beings.

At present the sacred shirt is made of nine pieces of white cotton cloth in a particular shape with a pocket in front. This pocket is known as *kisse-i-kerfe,* 'the pocket of good deeds'. The sacred shirt is an emblem of purity and virtue. It indicates the path of Asha which is the religious path of a Zoroastrian. The sacred shirt with the bag of meritorious deeds shall accompany the soul after a Zoroastrian passes away. Hence the sacred shirt reminds every Zoroastrian that it is the religious duty of a Zoroastrian to be diligent throughout his or her life in filling up the bag of merit in the world.

The sacred girdle is made up of 72 strands of wool — symbolically representing the 72 chapters of the Yasna — woven into a belt. It passes round the waist thrice with four knots, two in front and two in the rear. The sacred girdle is the belt of religious duty. It reminds every Zoroastrian to do the duties of life. Hence, the Zoroastrian sacred emblems are the emblems of the path of purity, virtue and duty.

The Sun and Fire

In Zoroastrianism, all good creations of God are his representatives in this world. Among these creations, the luminous heavenly bodies, particularly, the sun, and fire in various forms, occupy a special position. Ahura Mazda is the most beneficent spirit, and a spirit even among the spirits. Hence He is invisible to us. But Ahura Mazda is 'full of lustre, full of glory'. Hence all luminous creations are regarded as representatives of Ahura Mazda. The sun, the greatest luminous heavenly body visible to us, and fire in various forms are specially regarded and extolled as the representatives of Ahura Mazda.

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The sun and the lights are the emblems of adoration of Ahura Mazda:

The lights, the sun, the bright risings of the day:
(these are) for Your adoration through holiness,
O Mazda Ahura! **(Yasna 50.10)**

Similarly, fire or heat energy plays an important part in our life in this world. As a luminous creation in direct and close contact with human beings, fire in one form or another plays an important part in the religious life of man, and in almost all religions of the world. In Zoroastrian religion, fire is specially venerated as the shining emblem of Ahura Mazda. In the Avesta, fire is called 'the son of Ahura Mazda'. As the son or representative of Ahura Mazda, the presence of fire in all Zoroastrian ceremonies is inevitable. So also the presence of *Agni* is inevitable in Vedic ceremonies. In the Rigveda, Agni is *yajnasya deva,* 'god of ceremony', *yajnanam pita,* 'father of ceremonies', and *yajnasya rathyah,* 'charioteer of ceremony'.

PRAYER AND CEREMONY

The Avesta words for prayer are: *namah,* 'bowing, obeisance, homage', *staota, staoma,* 'praise', *vahma,* 'adoration', *vachah,* 'word, speech', *sravah,* 'chant, hymn', *manthra,* 'thought (force), holy word, spell'. Among these the Avesta *manthra* (Sanskrit *mantra*) plays an important part, and occupies an important position. It is the holy word of divine origin.

That Manthra of prosperity did Ahura Mazda produce in accord with Truth, sweetness for the world for those requiring (spiritual) nourishment, through the command of the Beneficent One! **(Yasna 29.7)**

Unto him the best, who, the learned one,
shall reveal my true Manthra, which (is)
of Perfection, of Truth, and of Immortality! **(Yasna 31.6)**

There were various collections of Manthras in ancient times. The Manthras were recited and chanted in ancient times very carefully according to prescribed rules. Among the Avesta prayers, Ahura Vairya (later Ahunavar) is the most sacred formula recited with special reverence and devotion by the Zoroastrians. It is the holy word of God, which was uttered in the beginning of the worldly creations. It was first chanted in the material world by Zoroaster, observing the rules of metre with louder intonation at the end (Yasna 9.14). Similarly, the Gathas are celestial songs to be chanted according to the rules line by line, stanza by stanza, in proper order. The Gathas are a source of spiritual nourishment and protection, and they are spiritual food and raiment for the soul.

The general Avesta word for 'ceremony' is *yasna,* which corresponds to Sanskrit *yagna*, 'sacrifice, worship (with offering)'. The Avesta word is also used for the ceremony of invocation and dedication of high order, requiring ritually purified utensils and libations, and performed by specially

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qualified priests and in ritually purified places. The yasna ceremony occupies an important place in the Zoroastrian rituals. It is celebrated on various solemn occasions of the remembrance of the souls of the departed persons, as well as on festive occasions as thanksgiving services. The Yasna is the basic ritual text, the other texts, Visparad and Videvdad, are supplementary texts, and they are never recited exclusively as independent texts in a ceremony. Some of the chapters of the Visparad are intermingled with those of the Yasna for recital in the Visparad ceremony. In the Videvdad ceremony, all three texts are recited and their chapters are intermingled and arranged in a particular order for ceremonial recitation. In these ceremonies Ahura Mazda, Amesha Spentas and Yazatas are invoked and worshipped by chanting sacred Manthras, by performing the ceremony with ceremonial implements, and dedicating consecrated offerings and libations. The offerings include spiritual virtues, good thought, good word, good deed, and representatives of good creations of the world. In these ceremonies, *haoma*-twigs are ceremoniously pounded, and their juice is extracted, and it is mixed with sacred water and milk. This haoma-juice forms the ceremonial libation along with *dron* (sacred bread), which is offered to the spiritual beings, and partaken of by the devotees at the end of the ceremony. One may compare the Avesta *haoma* with the Sanskrit *soma*. In the Vedic ceremonies, soma juice is prepared and offered to the spiritual beings, and drunk by the devotees.

The Zoroastrian ceremonies generally performed at present may be divided into the following five groups: (1) Purificatory ceremonies; (2) Initiation and marriage ceremonies; (3) Thanksgiving, invocatory and dedicatory ceremonies; (4) Ceremonies for departed persons: (a) disposal of the dead body; (b) for the soul and the holy spirit (Avesta *fravaṣhi*); (5) Ceremonies for consecration of places of worship and installations of the holy fire.

Ancient Fire Temples: As one of the most amazing creations, and one of the noblest and most inspiring emblems of God, fire received universal homage and veneration in one way or another in nearly all countries and in nearly all religions of the world, particularly in the religions of the Aryan peoples. In pre-Zoroastrian times, holy fires were consecrated and installed in properly constituted and sanctified places, which were used as places of worship in ancient Iran. This practice of establishing holy fires goes back to the Indo-Iranian period. Besides ancient Iranian literature, Vedic literature too has references to holy fires. The Rigveda mentions three holy fires: *Bharatagni,* 'Agni of Bharata', *Daivavatagni,* 'Agni of Daivavata', and *Daivadasagni,* 'Agni of Daivadasa'. It appears the first name indicates the national importance of the sacred fire. The other two fires may have been named after the founders. The Rigveda mentions Agni 'in the highest seat'. This also suggests the consecrated holy fire installed in a properly constituted place of worship.

Three Oldest Holy Fires of Iran: The illustrious kings and heroes of ancient Iran had established holy fires for religious purposes, and also for com-

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memorating historical events of national importance. The ancient holy fires are, therefore, regarded as religious as well as national institutions. The Avesta mentions holy fires of Kayanian and Iranian Glory, of Kavay Haosravah (Kay Khusro), and of Mount Raevant. In Pahlavi literature, these are, respectively, mentioned as Adar Farnbag, Adar Gushnasp and Adar Burzinmeher. These three are the oldest and most historic holy fires of ancient Iran. According to the Pahlavi-Pazand texts, these three holy fires are guardians, respectively, of three classes of ancient Iranian society, namely, the priest, the warrior and the agriculturist.

The consecrated holy fires were in existence in Achaemenian, Parthian and Sassanian times. Avesta *verethraghna* (Sanskrit *vritrahan, vritraghna*) is the angel of Victory. In later speech, the Avesta names appear as *varhran, bahram.* The Pahlavi Atash Varhran appears as Atash Bahram in Persian. When Ardashir, the founder of the Sassanian empire, escaped from Ardavan, and was out of danger of being captured, he established a city called Bokht-Ardashir, and he ordered the installation of Fire Varhran in that city. He ordered also the establishment of Fire Varhran in various cities. Similarly, other Sassanian emperors established various holy fires in Iran.

Zoroastrian Places of Worship: The consecrated holy fire is kept in a sanctum, which is a specially constructed chamber, bounded by walls and set apart by boundary lines. Only priests having special qualifications and ritual purity are allowed to enter the sanctum. The period of the day and night is divided into five watches or *Gahs.* A special *bui* ceremony, offering fragrance to the holy fire, is performed five times a day, in the beginning of each of the five watches of the day.

The Zoroastrian fire-temples and places of worship are specially built with various boundary lines, known in the Avesta as *karsha,* 'a furrow, a channel'. These boundary lines are drawn on the ground or constructed on the floor, which mark and enclose a ritually purified and sanctified place for consecrated holy fire or for ritually purified ceremonial utensils, and for performing the ceremonies of high order. When the ritually purified utensils and ceremonial implements are placed, and when a ceremony of high order is being performed in the enclosed places, the boundary lines must not be crossed by any unauthorised and unqualified person or by any foreign object. If the boundary lines are thus crossed, ritual purity is vitiated.

Since all Zoroastrian fire-temples and places of worship are ritually purified and consecrated places, they are meant only for the Zoroastrians. Even the Zoroastrians — both males and females, priests and laymen — have to observe certain rules of purity when a Zoroastrian wishes to enter a fire-temple or to attend a ceremony. In certain circumstances, even the Zoroastrians are forbidden to enter a fire-temple or a place of worship, or to attend a religious ceremony.

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The Scriptures

Devotion to Ahura Mazda and Spiritual Beings

Do I pray with obeisance,
With upstretched hands, for this help,
First, O Mazda! for all deeds,
With Truth, of the Holy Spirit,
Wisdom of Good Thought—
So I satisfy the soul of the Creation!
Yasna 28.1

I, who, O Mazda Ahura!
Would approach You with Good Thought!
My disciples, do You grant—
Of both lives, of matter and mind—
Success on account of Truth,
Whereby the faithful ,may rest in bliss!
Yasna 28.2

I, who weave a hymn to You,
Unique, O Right, O Good Thought,
And to Mazda Ahura!
And to those for whom Kingdom eternal
Right-mindedness doth prosper!
To me come for help on invocation!
Yasna 28.3

Mazda is the most mindful of plans,
Which indeed were made in the past,
By the demons and by men,
And which will be made hereafter!
Ahura is the sole decider,
So may it be to us as He wills!
Yasna 28.4

When shall I see You, O Right,
And Good Thought, as one who knows,
And the throne of most powerful
Ahura Mazda, (also) Reverence?
By this Manthra, Holy Word,
We convince the ignorant unto the Greatest!
Yasna 28.5

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Creator of Light and Cosmic Law

Who (Ahura Mazda) thought first,
(Heavenly) realms filled with lights!
He, by wisdom, is the creator of Cosmic Law,
Whereby Best Mind upholds—
These dost Thou, O Mazda, exalt through Spirit—
Thou, who, O Mazda, (art) ever the same!

Then, Thee did I conceive through mind,
O Mazda, to be the first and last,
Father of Good Mind,
Since Thee did I apprehend in (my) eye,
True Creator of the Cosmic Law,
Lord over the actions of life!

Yasna 31.7-8

Creator of Worldly Creations

That unto Thee I ask, truth unto me dost Thou Speak, O Ahura!
Who (is) the Creator, Father of Right at first?
Who for the sun and the stars laid the path?
Who (is it) by whom the moon waxes and wanes, except Thee?
These and others, O Mazda, do I wish to know!

Who maintains the earth and the skies
From falling down? Who, the waters and plants?
Who to wind and clouds yoked swiftness?
Who (is) the Creator, O Mazda, of Good Thought?

What artist created lights and darkness?
What artist created sleep and wakefulness?
Who (is it) by whom the dawn, noon and night,
Which (are) the reminders of duty unto the wise?

What I proclaim—if it (is) so the truth:
Shall the Right Mind strengthen the Law through actions?
Is Thy Dominion arranged through Good Mind?
For whom didst Thou fashion the fertile joy-making earth?

Who fashioned the blessed Right Thought with Dominion?
Who made the son dutiful to the father through life-force?
These I strive to know through Thee, O Mazda,
The Creator of all through the Holy Spirit!

Yasna 44.3-7

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The Knowing Lord

Then Ahura Mazda Himself said,
Knowing the prayers by perception!
Yasna 29.6

Taking account of the living ones, O Ahura,
Thou hast known through Best Mind!
Surely in Thy Dominion, O Mazda,
(Thy) command shall be established through Right!
Yasna 32.6

To them Right Mind shall proclaim the judgements
of Thy wisdom—Whom no one deceives!
Yasna 43.6

Then do I speak of the foremost of this life,
Which the wise Ahura Mazda declared to me!
Yasna 45.3

Physical and Ethical Dualism

Dost Thou hear with ears the best,
Dost Thou understand with bright intellect,
Of two choices of decision,
Man by man, for one's own person,
Before the great consummation,
To be accomplished for us, O thinking ones!

Then these two spirits at first—
Which (two) revealed united activ ity:
In thought and in word,
And in action, the two are better and worse.
And of these two,
The good-givers chose right, not the evil-givers!

And then these two spirits,
When first met together they produced
Life and non-life,
And so shall the existence be up to the end!
Worst unto the wicked ones,
But unto the holy the Best Mind!

Of these two spirits,
The Wicked chose worst-doing,
Right the Most Beneficent Chose,
Who puts on hardest firmaments,
Also those who please Ahura (Chose Right),
By truthful actions, believing Mazda!
Yasna 30.2-5

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The Path of Life

On the righteous paths of Truth,
Wherein dwells Ahura Mazda!

Yasna 33.5

Dost Thou through Right instruct us
The paths, good to tread, of Good Mind!

Yasna 34.12

Then the man shall attain to the better than good,
Who shall teach us the righteous paths of bliss,
Of this material life and of mental—(the paths leading)
To the real existences wherein dwells Ahura (such a person is)
The faithful, belonging to Thee, good, knowing, holy, O Mazda!

Yasna 43.3

Then do I worship Thee, praising, O Mazda Ahura!
Together with Right and with Best Mind,
And with Dominion, whereby the aspirant would stand in the path,
For hearing Revelation unto the devotees in the Abode of Song!

Yasna 50.4

Divine Justice

Holy, then, did I conceive Thee, O Mazda Ahura,
When did I see Thee first in the birth of existence,
When didst Thou fix deeds and words with requital:
Bad unto the bad, good blessing unto the good,
Through Thy wisdom at the final turning of Creation!

Yasna 43.5

That requital didst Thou fix for the rivals,
Through Thy blazing fire, O Mazda,
Through molten metal,
For affording proof in both lives:
Punishment unto the wicked, bliss unto the holy!

Yasna 51.9

Renovation

Then may we be those,
Who shall make the life renovated!

Yasna 30.9

Through Thy power, O Ahura,
Make life a reality, renovated by (Thy) will!

Yasna 34.15

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Festivals

The Persian word "Jashan" is the general term for a festival. It is also the name of the religious ceremony performed on festive as well as on solemn occasions. Jashan has religious, seasonal, and historical importance, but religious importance permeates all jashans—the jashan of the birthday of the Prophet has historical as well as religious importance. Similarly, seasonal festivals are also religious festivals. Jashans are observed also on the day on which the day and the month bear the same name. These are the monthly jashans, and the ceremony is performed in honour of the presiding deity.

Generally, on festive occasions the prayers of thanksgiving and invocation of God's blessings are offered. On solemn occasions, besides prayers to divinities, the souls of the departed dear ones are also remembered by offering appropriate prayers.

In Zoroastrianism, fire is regarded as "the son of Ahura Mazda," that is, the representative of God, and as such the presence of fire in every Zoroastrian ceremony is inevitable. In the jashan ceremony also, the presence of fire is essential. The offerings in the ceremony consist of the representatives of the creations of Nature—water, milk, flowers, and fruits. Some sweet dishes, generally made of wheat flour, milk, sugar, and butter, are optionally prepared as offerings in the jashan ceremony.

Naoroz: The New Year Day was celebrated in ancient times as the main spring festival. This original import is generally forgotten in India and it is celebrated as the day of religious duties and festivities.

Khordadsal: Birthday of Zoroaster, observed as a sacred day. Special prayers are recited in remembrance and honour of the soul and spirit of the Prophet. Religious discourses are conducted.

Festival of Fire: Jashan and worship of God, and the divinity presiding over fire.

Zarthoshtno Diso: The day of passing away of Zoroaster, a day of ceremonies and prayers. Religious discourses are held.

Fravardegan: A period of 10 days at the end of the year specially set apart for performing ceremonies in honour of the *Fravashis,* the guardian spirits, and the souls of the departed ones of the family. Water and flowers are regarded as the emblems of *Fravashi.*

Gahambars: Six seasonal festivals in the year: (1) mid-spring; (2) mid-summer; (3) harvest; (4) beginning of winter; (5) mid-winter; and (6) end of winter.

These festivals are based on seasonal divisions of the year, applicable to the climatic conditions of ancient Iran. Due to different geographical and climatic conditions, these festivals do not fit in with the seasons in the present circumstances. The festivals, however, are celebrated at regular intervals during the year as they were arranged in ancient times.

During these festivals the jashan ceremonies are performed with appropriate prayers for thanksgiving and invocation. Formerly, after the ceremonies, communal feasts were held.

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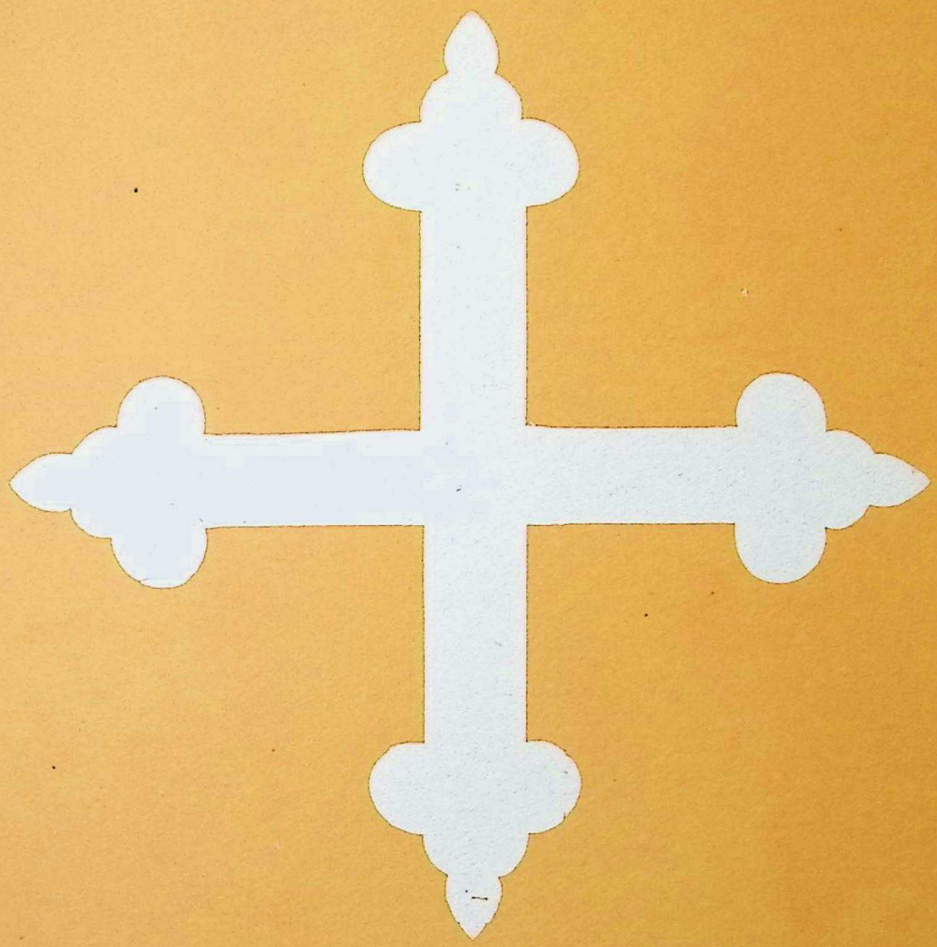

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Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστιν, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ γεγέννηται καὶ γινώσκει τὸν Θεόν. ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν Θεόν, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν. ἐν τούτῳ ἐφανερώθη ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅτι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ ἀπέσταλκεν ὁ Θεὸς εἰς τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα ζήσωμεν δι' αὐτοῦ.

Beloved, let us love one another;
for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.
He who does not love does not know God;
for God is love.
In this the love of God was made manifest among us,
that God sent his only Son into the world,
so that we might live through him.

First letter of St John 4 7-9

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Christianity

Christians form a small minority in the religious statistics of India; only one out of every forty Indians is a Christian, about 20 million. They are fairly spread out; one finds them in practically all the sub-cultural areas and regions of the country. They are there not as 'settlers' or as 'foreign nationals' coming from some different place and culture; rather, they are sons of the soil and belong to one or another of the lifestyles that go to make up the complex mosaic of India. Dravidians or Aryans, high castes or low, city elite or tribals, factory workers or farmers — in all the corners of the nation — have accepted Jesus Christ as their *guru* and share with the Christians a common way of life.

There are differences in their distribution, no doubt. One finds a greater concentration of Christians in South India, since Christianity took root there in its very early centuries.

One of the most typical and noticeable activities of Christians is their Sunday gathering. For them Sunday is 'the day of the Lord'. The worship generally includes hymns,various forms of prayers and the reading aloud of some passages from the *Bible*. Like hymns, these readings refer not only to God but also to the man Jesus Christ, alluded to as his Son. At least on some important Sundays, most groups celebrate a symbolic 'meal' together, in which they remember and re-live in some way a very important event that took place during the last days of Jesus, around the first week-end of April of (probably) the year 30 A.D.

The worship is celebrated in thousands of churches all over the country, Sunday after Sunday, and some churches even celebrate it every

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day. It is sung in the villages of Chotanagpur and in the cathedrals of Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Trivandrum. It is conducted in various forms and in many languages.

This form of worship, generally referred to as Communion Service, the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, goes back in remembrance of what Jesus did on the last night he spent with his disciples and friends. Writing about it 25 years later, St. Paul narrates the event in this way: 'The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and, when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup after super, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (Corinthian 11:23-26)

The Sunday gathering is a continuation of the action of Jesus at his last supper. It contains a very important mystical element. It is not merely a prayer-meeting; it is an occasion on which the remembrance of Jesus makes the community aware of what Jesus did and taught, and of his living presence among them and in the world. Thanks to this community-gathering at ' the Lord's Supper ', the Christian life is an experience that ' the Lord is alive ', and in this his new life, the meaning of his death is grasped as a source of grace for entire humankind. The memory of Jesus is, therefore, the core of the Christian religion. To understand Christianity, we must ask: Who was, or is, Jesus Christ?

JESUS CHRIST

Around the year 782 from the foundation of Rome (i.e., the year 30 of what is now called the Christian era, or the year 87 of the Vikrama era), an impressive personality appeared on the public scene of Galilee, one of the Roman provinces in the northern part of modern Israel. His name was Jesus. He was of humble origin and had been brought up in Nazareth, a small town of Galilee. He spoke directly to the crowds in the style of the prophets who had spoken or written in that country centuries earlier. The core of his teaching was: ' The time has come and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and deliver the Good News!' (Mark 1:15). According to him, a special moment had then arrived in the history of his people. God was going to do something very great and set things right. What this 'setting things right' meant was at first not clear to his listeners; in fact, many were under the impression that a political revolution against the Romans was brewing. Only later did they understand.

The expression ' Kingdom of God ' may have political overtones, but Jesus was singularly unconcerned with politics. And his listeners soon came to understand the Kingdom of God to mean the experience of the power of God coming to rule over men's hearts and heal them, although this had many social repercussions that threatened the establishment.

The kingdom which Jesus announced had to be 'received' by man; this is expressed by two words which describe two different aspects of

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change in man: ' Repent ' (or ' turn away from your sins ' in the translation used above; sometimes translated as ' be converted '); and ' Believe ' (or ' have faith '), i.e., accept the Good News that in Jesus God comes to us with his power. Such is the real meaning of ' conversion ' in Christianity: it is not a sociological change, but a religious event, the free and joyful acceptance of the message that God comes to renew us inwardly. As Nirad Chaudhuri rightly says, the Christian insistence is that ' conversion is at the core of religious freedom ', for it is an answer to what is primary in Christianity — not primarily a moral code, but a view of man's relationship with God coming to him with a message.

The coming of God's Kingdom to mankind is what the disciples of Jesus believed in Palestine in the year 30, and what Christians in India believe today. They realised then, as they realise today, that the coming of God was related in a very special way to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In the extraordinary wisdom of his teaching, in the holiness of his life, in the power he possessed to change man's heart, in the love he constantly showed for the humblest, the poorest, the downtrodden, even in his healing power directed to the service of the poor, the first followers of Jesus experienced that God's reign had come to them. The accounts of his life left to us by his immediate disciples are full of instances of miraculous cures and happenings. What matters in these accounts is not that Jesus had a superior power or control over hidden forces — the disciples never paid much attention to this aspect of the events — but that Jesus put the whole power of his personality at the service of a new purpose. The important aim for him was to heal man — not just to give him external, medical cures, but an inner healing of the heart and of the whole inner life so as to restore to him the capacity for goodness. This is salvation. As Jesus himself said, ' I have come in order that they might have life in all its fullness ' (John 10:10). Or as Peter, the foremost of his disciples, said in a sermon after Jesus' death, ' You know about Jesus of Nazareth, how God poured out on him the Holy Spirit and power. He went everywhere, doing good and healing all who were under the power of the Devil, for God was with him ' (Acts 10:38).

The disciples expressed what they thought about Jesus in many ways: He was a teacher, a prophet, a wise man — but even more than that. He was greater than all their great ancestors, greater than Abraham, Moses or King David. He was, in fact, the ' Messiah ' or Masih, or the ' Christ '. These two words, Hebrew and Greek, respectively, have the same meaning, ' the anointed one ' or *abhishikta*. The prophets had spoken of a person who would come as ' anointed ' by God, and the Jews for centuries believed that God would send him to restore the Kingdom of Israel to its pristine glory, and to change the hearts and minds of the people. The disciples saw the fulfilment of this hope in Jesus, the Christ, or Jesus Christ.

However, it was difficult to understand Jesus as the Christ, because a great calamity put an end to his work. He had preached for less than

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three years, when the powerful league of priests and politicians of the established order mounted their opposition to him. They feared him as a dangerous man: he did not observe the social distinctions customary in their society, he mixed freely with sinners although pretending to be a religious teacher, he talked to women and to people of low reputation; he was not always careful about observing all the traditional religious practices like ablutions, feasts, rituals; he was even seen healing a man on the sacred rest-day or Sabbath, when no man was allowed to work.

When questioned about his conduct, he would answer with both insight and incisiveness. When accused of mixing with sinners, he simply replied, 'People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. I have not come to call the respectable people, but the outcastes' (Mark 2:17). When blamed for not respecting the sacredness of the day of rest, he retorted, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27). When asked to come out and meet his mother and brothers, he spoke of a more universal brotherhood. When condemned for not observing the ritual of customary purifications, he replied: 'Nothing that goes into a person from the outside can really make him unclean. (In saying this, he declared that all foods are fit to be eaten). It is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean. For from inside, from a man's heart, come evil ideas that lead him to immoral things, to rob, kill, commit adultery, covet and to do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride and folly — all these evil things come from inside man and make him unclean. But to eat without washing your hands as they say you should — this does not make a man unclean' (Mark 7:18-23).

This attitude brought a great sense of liberation to the rule-bound religious society of his time, and gave to man's spirit, the freedom to grow and to blossom. Yet at the same time, it made great demands on man. It is the heart itself that must be kept pure and holy, and the implications of this are ruthlessly spelled out in radical, if symbolic, language. For example, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell' (Matthew 5:27-30). Or, "If you forgive others the wrongs they have done you, your Father in heaven will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father in heaven will not forgive the wrongs you have done' (Matthew 6: 14-15).

Appearing to the acknowledged teachers and rulers of society as a dangerous man, Jesus sensed their opposition growing, but refused to be cowed down by their veiled threats or even by their attempts on his life, and continued to preach his message boldly. He offered his disciples a challenge not to run away, but to live courageously by their convictions:

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' If anyone wants to come with me, ' he told them, 'he must forget himself, carry his cross and follow me!' (Mark 8:34). Then, on the big annual religious feast of his country, Jesus publicly confronted the power of the priests by driving out with a whip all the merchants who traded in the holy temple. As a consequence, the priests in power decided to do away with Jesus.

In the last hours of his life, Jesus showed the great moral strength that was in him. A few hours before he was captured, he gave his disciples a telling example of what his relations with them were, and of what he expected of them; he washed their feet, as a slave or servant would do, and told them that if they were to be his disciples, they should likewise wash one another's feet. While showing great concern for the safety of his disciples and friends, he forbade any violent opposition to his captors and even protected them. While being nailed on the cross,he prayed to God, 'Father forgive them for they do not know what they do' (Luke 23:34). He hung on the cross for three agonizing hours till he died with this prayer on his lips: ' Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23:46). That was the end.

Or so it seemed. In fact, it was only the beginning. To their great astonishment, the disciples saw him a few hours later, fully alive, glorious, victorious. Going to his tomb where they had buried him, they found it empty! The confusion of those hours following his death shows through in the accounts that have come down to us. One thing was and is clear, that the disciples saw Jesus alive, that he had risen from the dead and sent them to continue his work. Clearly his existence did not belong any longer to this world, but it was nonetheless very real, and he became somehow linked with their own lives. The experience of this fact of the resurrection or 'arising-to-new-life' of Jesus is the basis for the whole of the Christian religion and its history.

This was a unique and unprecedented turn of events. But then the disciples were aware that in Jesus, God had done something unique. On the evidence of what they saw, and specially of the new power they felt within themselves for believing and for preaching it, they were absolutely sure that God had raised Jesus from the dead and made him alive, made him 'Lord' . By this they meant that Jesus was now in a new state of existence, 'at the right hand of God,' as they put it in their imaginative language, in which he could communicate spiritually with every man in existence, and freely offer his new power for goodness to all men. The kingdom of God about which he had spoken for three years was really this power given to man to rise to a higher form of life, if only he was willing to. And this higher form of life is valued not so much as a mystical experience — though mystical in a sense it was — but as a power to love, to forgive, to work for the dignity and growth of every man, and joyfully to suffer for this, if need be. The Kingdom was their ability to call everyone, and not merely those of their nationality, caste or religion, their brother or sister and to treat him or her as such.

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Son of God

The experience of this new life of Jesus or of the 'Resurrection' made the disciples re-think their view of the teacher and friend who had been close to them for two or three years. They paid fresh attention to some mysterious words which Jesus had used. They remembered with what great authority he had said to people, 'Your sins are forgiven', as if he were the master of the moral order, and of men's hearts. They re-called how definitely he had spoken of the Law of God and corrected the religious traditions of Judaism. They remarked that his constant reference to God was not in terms of 'Lord', 'Master', 'Absolute', 'Supreme Being' or 'Self'; but he called him simply 'Father', 'My Father', with the affection and familiarity with which a child addresses his father. How could he be so close to God? How could he claim to be so near to him, specially as his life did not give an impression of a *vairagi* or recluse or a *yogi* or anything of the kind? Above all, the disciples were reminded of what he had told them about himself, 'No one knows the Son but the Father; no one knows the Father but the Son and anyone whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). He obviously lived in a deep and constant communion with God, and his claim to be God's Son was clearly neither an empty boast nor a banal statement. He revealed who God really was.

'The Son of God'. what does this expression mean? To Christians, it does not mean that God has a spouse, a 'shakti' with whom He would have intercourse and from whom He would beget a son: they know fully well that God is a Spirit, has no matter and no body in himself, and therefore no sex and no sexual life. When he said that God was his Father, Jesus knew this, and the disciples also knew it. When Christians say that Jesus is the Son of God, they simply mean that God was fully manifested in the person of the man Jesus, that God gave Himself fully to Him as only God can give Himself, in such a way as to share with him His whole reality and existence; and that by this self-gift in love God as Father makes Jesus His *Son* in the full sense of the word, not by making 'another' God, which is obviously not possible, but by sharing His own Godhead with him.

Moreover, after his Resurrection, the disciples of Jesus experienced that God's power, a divinising power they called the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost, flowed from the person of the risen Jesus into their own lives. This power, they realized, contained in a way the heart of the living reality in Jesus, the essence which he shares with the Father. It was on account of this double experience of the oneness of Jesus with the Father and of the divinising power that flows from Jesus when man accepts him in faith, that later thinkers would formulate the Christian doctrine about God, namely, the 'Trinity'. The term does not allude to 'three Gods', which is clearly impossible, neither does it refer to a human way of speaking of God under three different aspects, but that in the one true and eternal God there is a mystery of life which we can never understand. As Father, God shares His Godhead by 'begetting' the Son, or giving His whole

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reality to him, and both of them experience themselves as one, their unity being the Holy Spirit. No Christian ever pretends to understand this mystery of the one God, but he accepts it as expressing the experience that comes from a believing contact with the person of Jesus. To this mystery apply the words of the *Taittiriya Upanishad, 'Yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha'*, 'From whence words return, and the mind, *without grasping it* . In spite of this, Christian prayer services will normally start by a *mangalacharanam* or an auspicious prayer, invoking the one God in His Trinity: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'

Though Jesus is believed by Christians to be in a very unique sense 'Son of God', he does not thereby cease to be a man. The disciples knew him and knew that he had been born and had grown as any other man, subject to suffering, to thirst, to hunger, to ignorance even, as is inevitable in the human condition. The only thing he did not have is what can be avoided, and that is sin. Like every man, he finally died,and yet 'he rose to new life'. This means for the Christian not only that his Self was immortal, but that in a wonderful way his whole personality, body and soul, was made new and alive in God. Incidentally, this belief in the resurrection is the reason for the importance Christians attach to the material world. They do not consider the world and the human body a prison from which man must escape. Evil and sin come from man's heart, not from matter. Matter is good, an essential part of man, for man is made by God not as an *atman* or soul that can exist perfectly without a body, but as a soul-in-matter, both aspects constituting the true reality and dignity of man. The body of Jesus rose then with him to the new life in God, although his new mode of existence no longer belongs to our spatio-temporal continuum. And like the body of Jesus, the final destiny of the world is to find its perfect reality in God.

Why did Jesus die on the cross? Externally, because of the opposition that his new ideas and preaching aroused in his own people, especially the leaders. But in a deeper, religious understanding of the event, this death had a special meaning. Christians have called it a *yajna* or a sacrifice, an offering to God, not just in order to restore the cosmic order, but rather to make a new union of man with God possible, and thus to conquer the massive sinfulness evident in the world. By the immense love and fidelity to the Father which Jesus showed even at the time of his death, he opened a possibility for man to love God. There and then,God gave Himself to Jesus and to his brothers — the whole of mankind — in a new way. This means that by Jesus's life and death God redeems, makes new and saves. Without that death and the subsequent new life, we would remain enclosed in our sinfulness. Thanks to his death,we can obtain a new life, a new power to love authentically, the perfect liberation. We never quite make full use of this power, but it manifests itself in our lives, and it is the power of God reaching all men through Jesus. This is God's 'grace'.

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THE CHURCH

Christians in India and elsewhere insist on the importance of the community of believers wherein they find the living memory of Jesus Christ. The Church has for them an important role to play in the task of salvation. They see man as essentially a member of a community, not an isolated island. Man's salvation cannot be found in pure isolation or *kaivalya*, or a mere individual escape from the sufferings of life. Salvation must include the building up of a true fellowship and deep communion with all men. The Church is the new community where the bonds of friendship and love are expressed in their deepest institutional form, in so far as the union of hearts is expressed by the sharing of the same faith in God and the acceptance of the same Lord as saviour.

This union of hearts and minds is not based on the racial bond of birth or caste, common language or culture, nor even on a uniform way of worship. In fact, within Christianity, there are many modes of worship even in the same Church, and new rites constantly emerge. The deeper union experienced in the Church is based on love and on the shared conviction of having been made one 'people' by God Himself through Jesus Christ. This union implies and calls for variety. An ancient description given of the Church is that it is both one and ' catholic '. ' Catholic ' means universal, capable of accepting and expressing itself in diverse forms of cultural and even of religious existence within the unity of the basic faith-experience. Thus, we have in India Christians from practically all its various subcultures and traditions. The Bengali Brahmin nationalist of the early twentieth century, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, could claim without betrayal of his Christian faith, 'I am a Hindu by birth, a Christian by rebirth.' He considered himself what in reality he was — a 'Hindu-Christian'.

The Church exists in a world of pluralism of faiths and secular movements. The Christians are related to the larger community of men, both at the national and the international level. Within this larger community the Christians as a group should like to be — they do not always succeed in bringing this wish into reality — a ' servant Church ', a Church at the service of man after the example of Jesus Christ who 'did not come to be served but to serve' (Matthew 20:28). For this reason the services which the Church organises for the benefit of men — educational, medical, social, religious — are not exclusively for the Christian community, but are extended to members of other communities also. With these communities the Church is endeavouring more and more to enter into dialogue and to work together towards a common service of God and of man. An important text of the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council (1962-65) says; 'The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these (other) religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims and must ever

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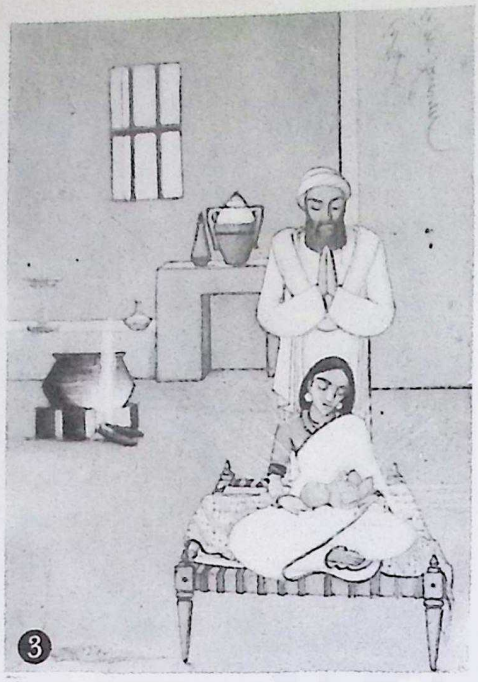

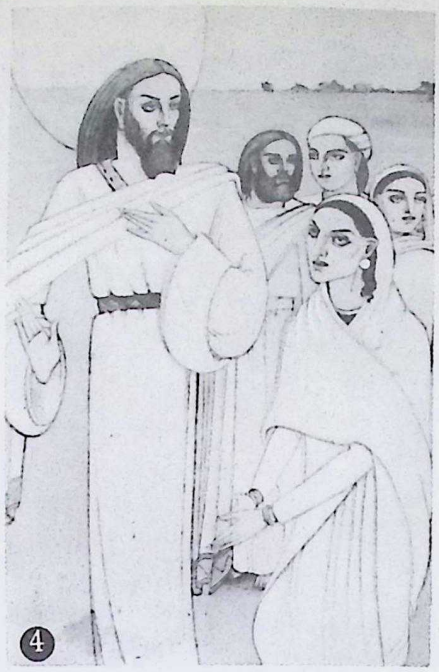

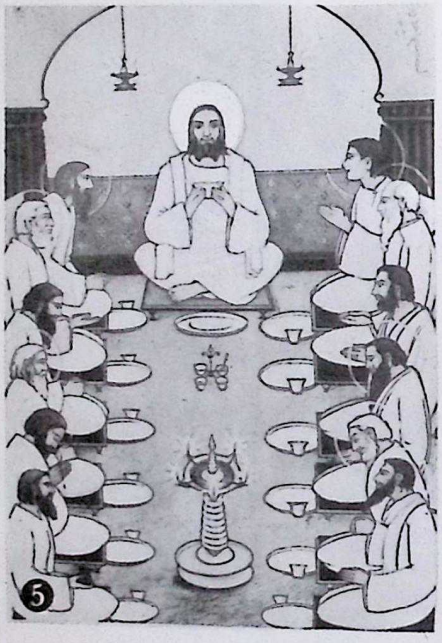

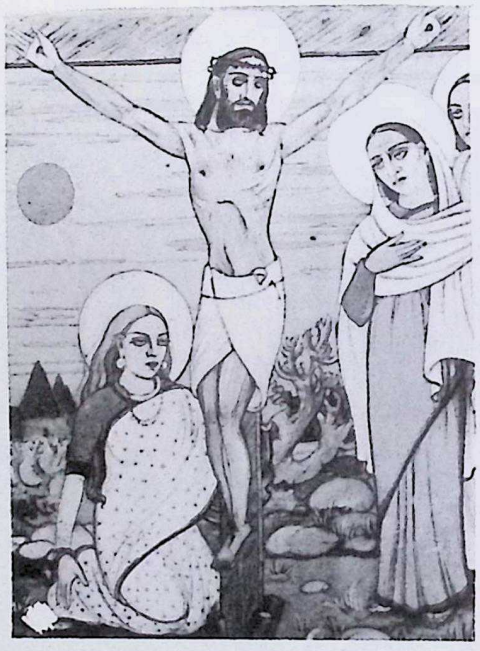

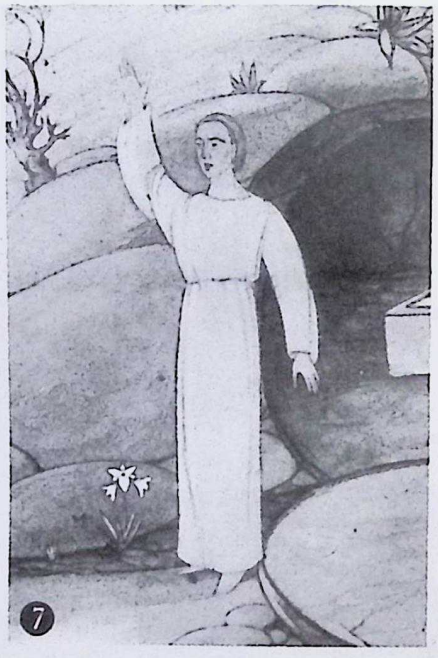

1. "I am the way, the truth and the lite (John 14.6). Jesus Christ. A painting of the Mughal period.

2-7. Paintings from the life of Jesus Christ by the Indian artist Angelo da Fonseca, a Goan. 2. The Annunciation. "The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived by the Holy Spirit." (Luke 2.19). 3. The Nativity. "And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in the manger because there was no place for them in the inn." (Luke 2.19). 4. Christ, the Healer. "And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom and healing . . . " (Matthew 4.23). 5. The Last Supper. "And he took a cup . . . he gave it to them saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' " (Matthew 26.27-28). 6. The Crucifixion. ". . . Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father unto thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23.44-46). 7. The empty tomb. ". . . Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here for he has risen, as he said." (Matthew 28.56).

8. A 19th-century stained glass window in the St. Mary of the Angels church in Pondicherry, illustrating the parable of Lazarus.

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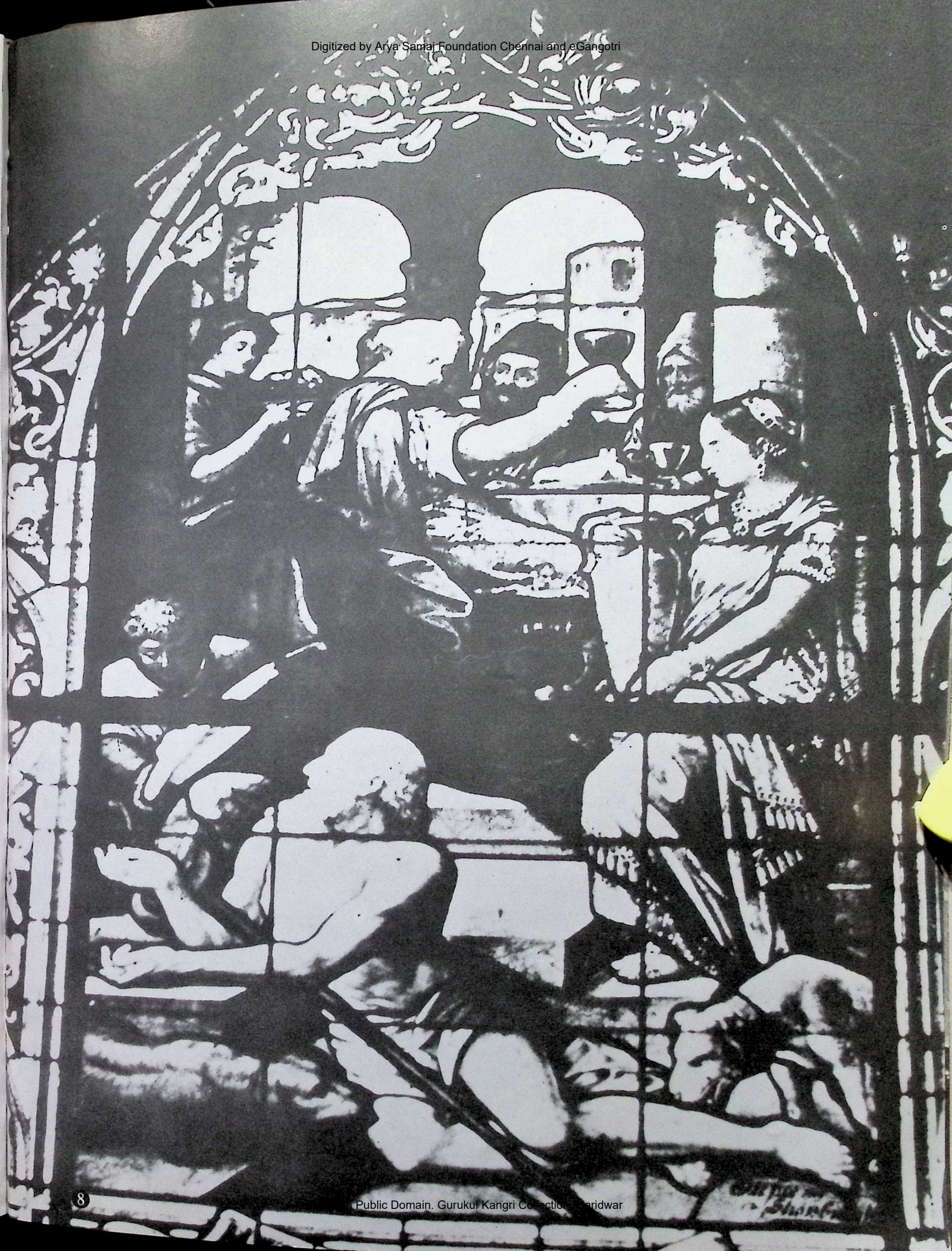

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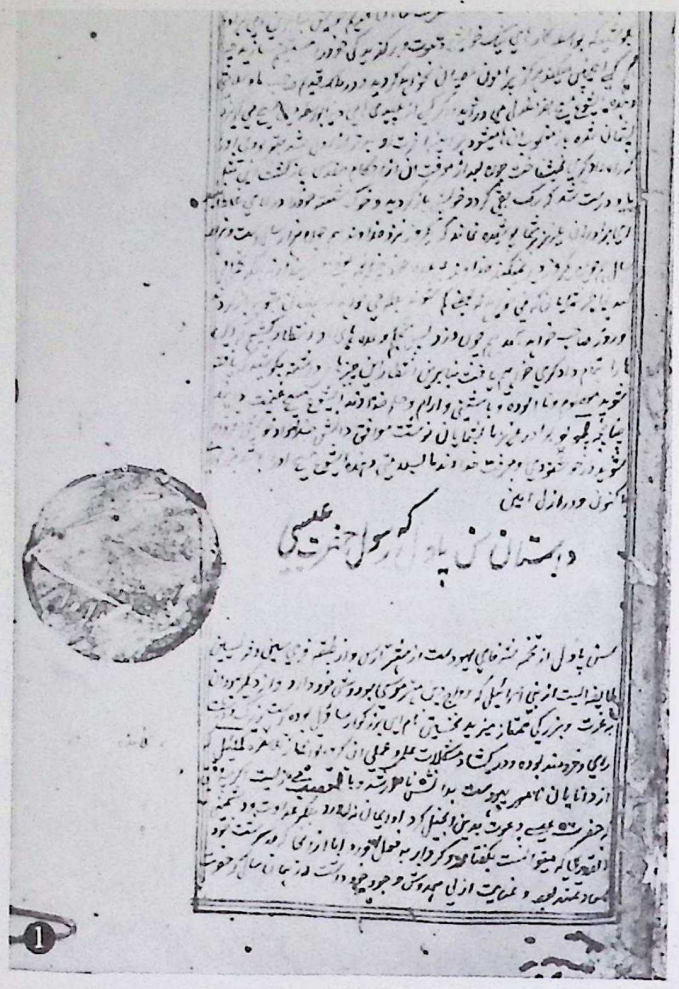

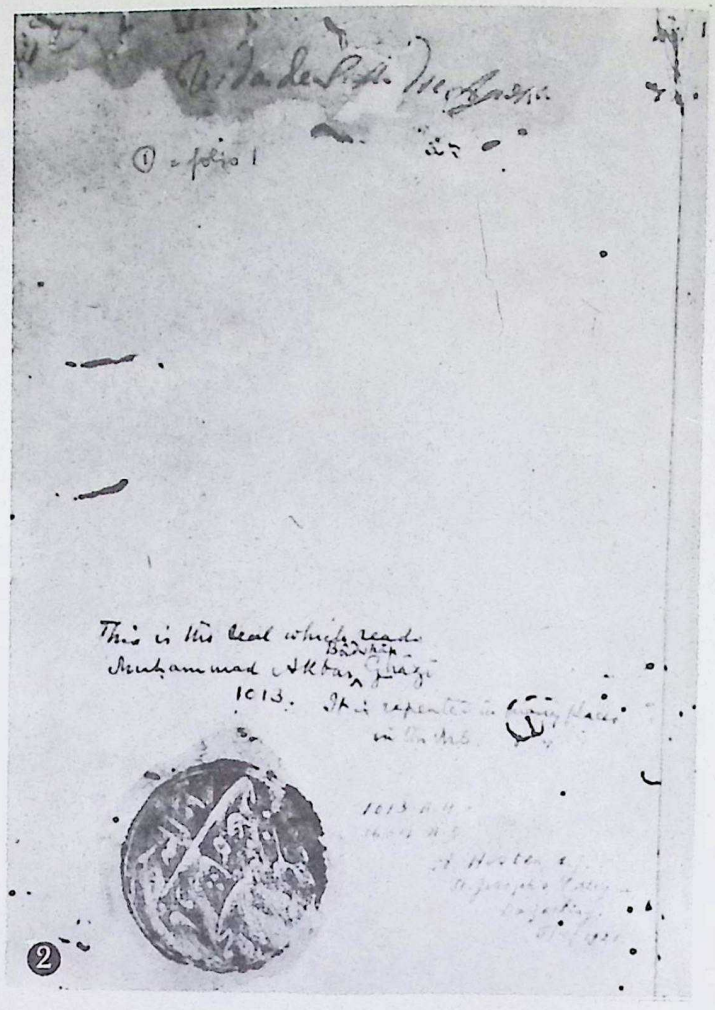

1-2. Two pages from "Life of the Apostles" in Persian by Fr. Jerome Xavier, a Jesuit priest at the court of Akbar. The page shows the seal of Akbar dated 1013 A.H. (1604 A.D.). The inscription in the middle is the title of the 4th chapter, "The Story of St. Paul", apostle of Jesus Christ—Dastan-i-San Paual Kih Rasul-i-Hazrat Isa.

3. The first New Testament in an Indian language was published in Tamil in 1715 at Tranquebar.

4. The Church of Our Lady, Panaji

FACSIMILE (REDUCED) OF THE TITLE-PAGE TO THE FIRST TAMIL NEW TESTAMENT, PUBLISHED AT TRANQUEBAR IN 1715

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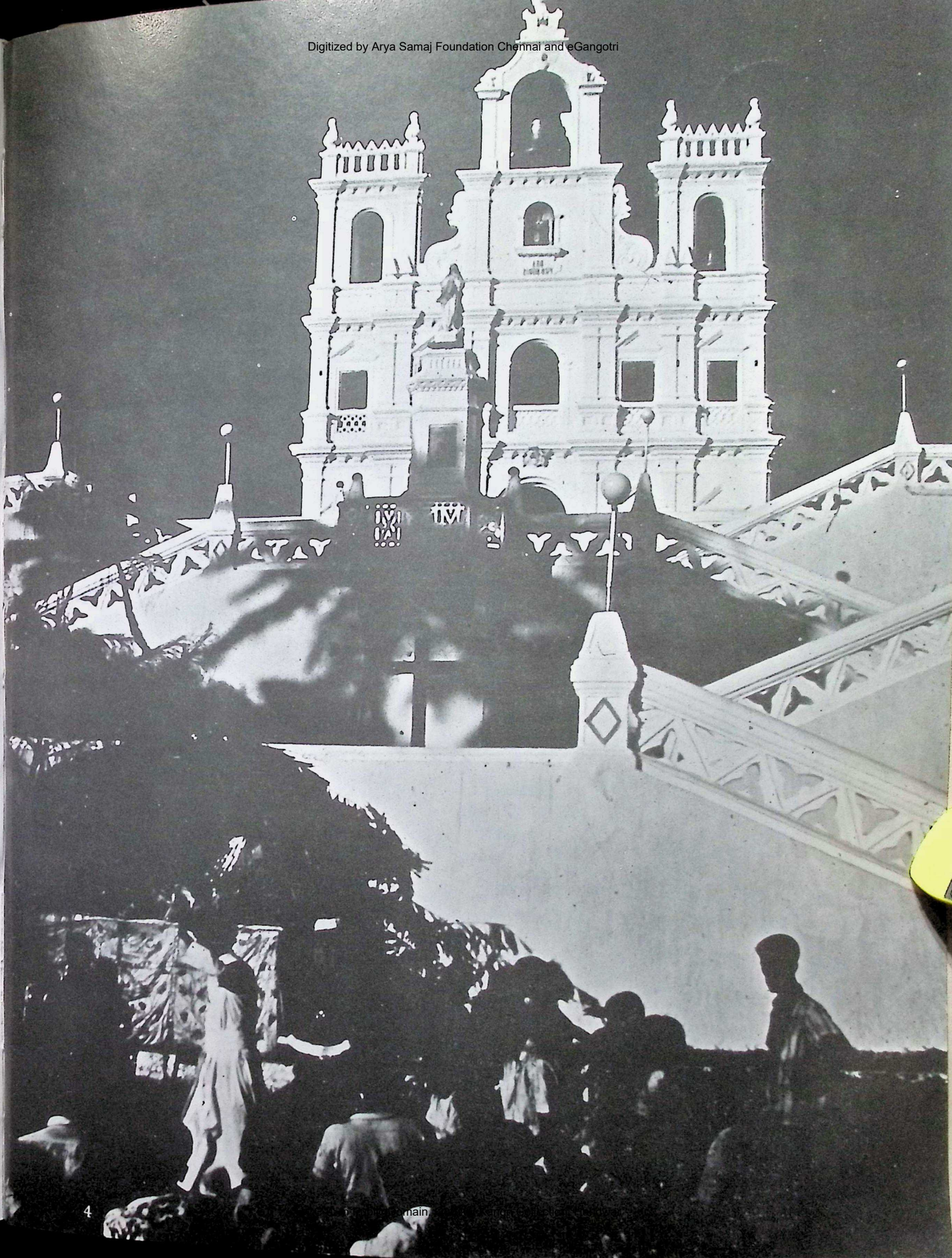

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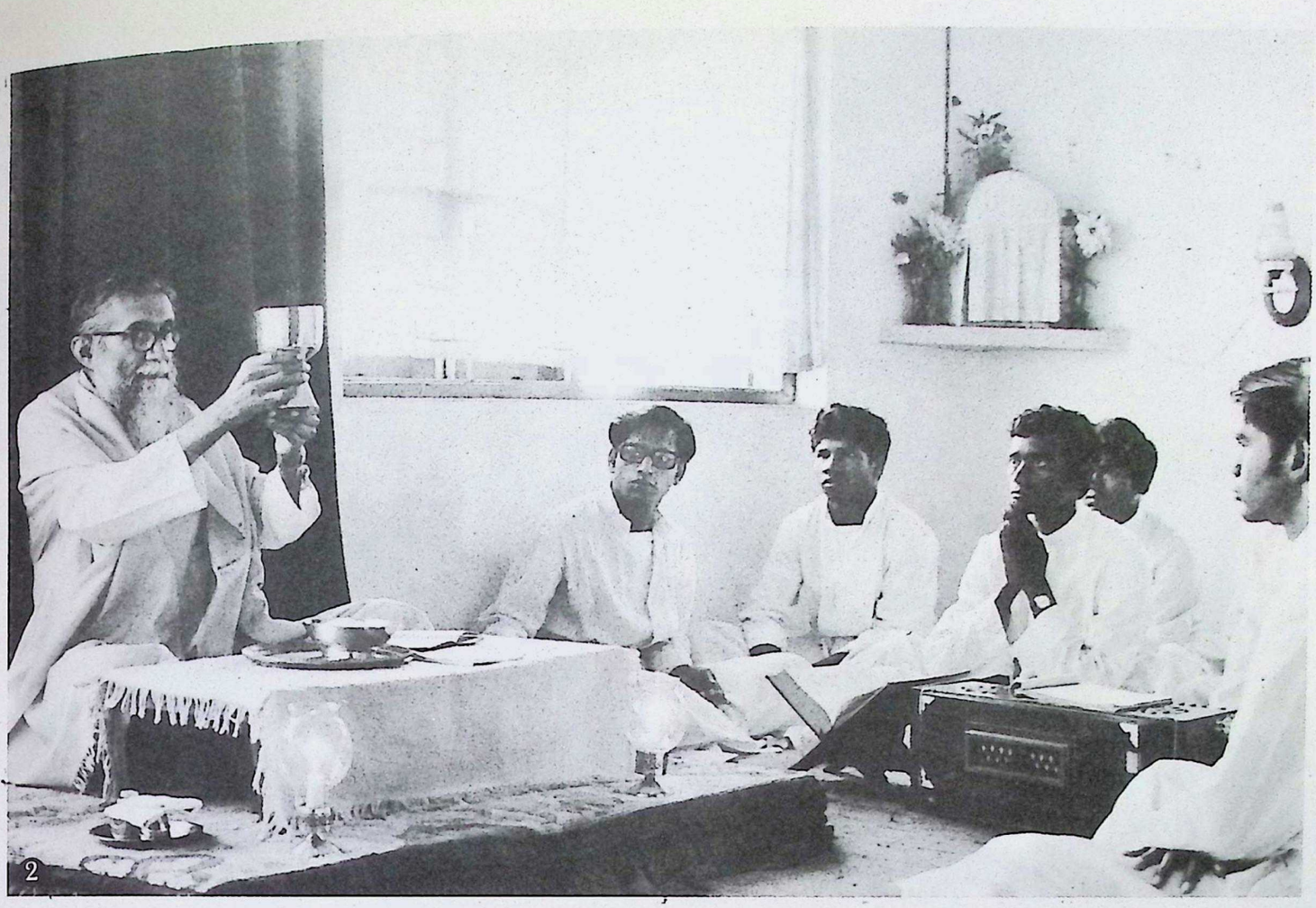

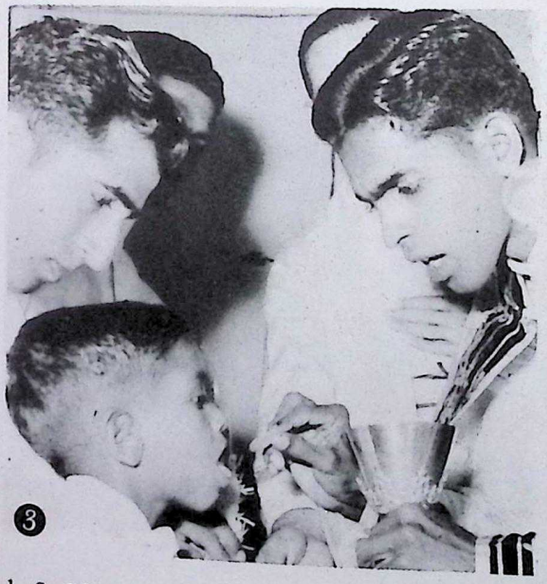

1. St. Thomas Church, Madras. St. Thomas, one of the 12 apostles of Jesus, is believed to have come to Kerala in 52 A.D. and to have died a martyr's death in Mylapore, Madras.

2. Holy mass. Indian style. Dhyan Ashram, Jesuit Novitiate, Calcutta.

3. "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belong the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19.140). A child taking his first holy Communion.

4. The ordination of two bishops in the catholic Syro-Malankara church in Kerala.

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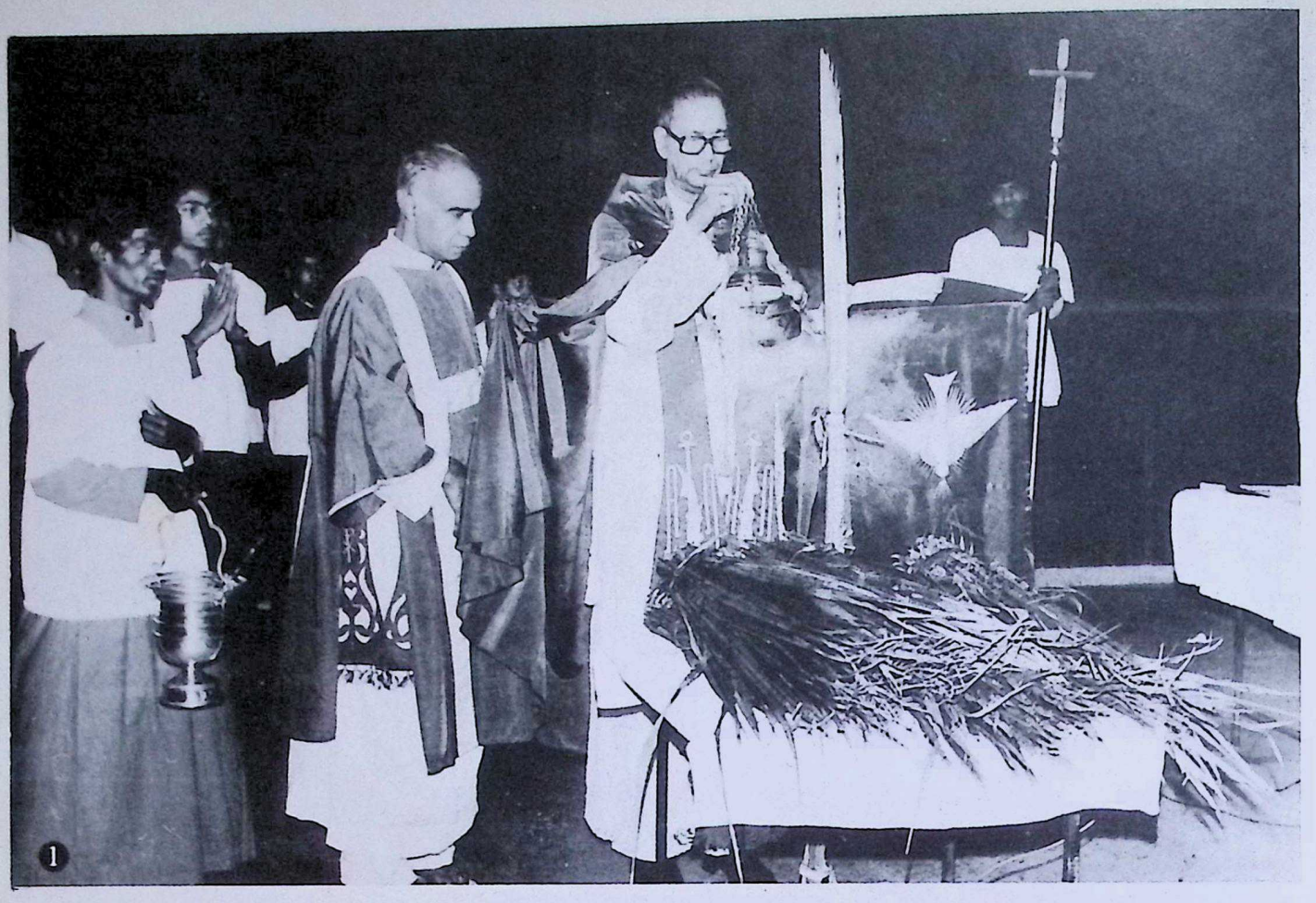

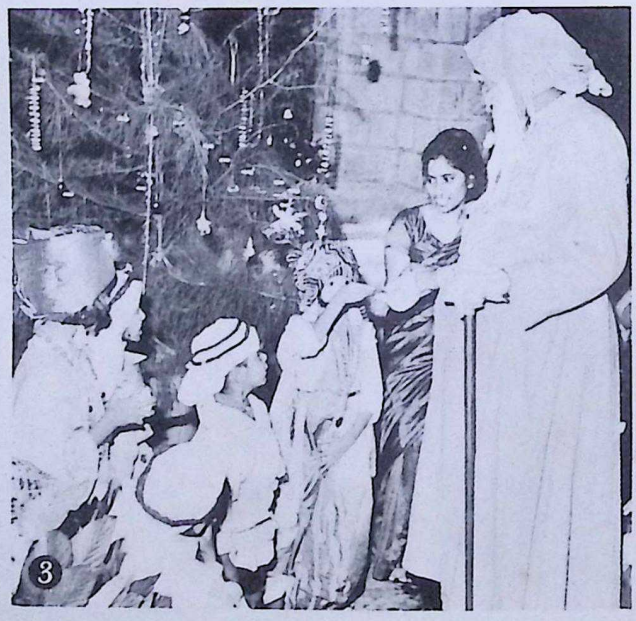

1. Palm Sunday observance. Bishop blessing palms in memory of the solemn entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem.

2. A bishop lights a great candle, symbol of the risen Christ, on Easter night (Saturday-Sunday). The Easter holy week of Christians culminates in the Easter vigil, celebration of the resurrection of Jesus—the light and the new life of the world.

3. Distribution of Christmas gifts to the children by Santa Claus. Santa Claus or Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of children and the personification of the Christmas spirit.

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proclaim Christ, 'the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6), in whom men find the fulness of religious life and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself (II Corinthians: 5:18-19). The Church, therefore, has this exhortation for her sons prudently and lovingly, through dialogue with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and love, to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men as well as the values in their society and culture' (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions, 2).

The above somewhat idealistic picture of the Christian Church corresponds to the doctrinal framework of what Christians should be. The reality is far from perfect. One of the most painful aspects of Christian life in India and elsewhere is the fact that Christians are divided. It is not just the fact that there are different rites and traditions within the Church, for this is welcome; but that there is no complete agreement as to the doctrinal and ethical implications of the Gospel. The divisions for the most part have not originated in India itself; they have been imported here from the West.

There were, in the course of the twenty centuries of Christian history, two major periods of division. The first was the division in the eleventh century between the Churches in Western Europe, on the one hand, and those in Eastern Europe, on the other, including whatever remained of Christianity in North Africa and Asia Minor. For many centuries a constant estrangement had grown between these two groups, partly due to the division of the Roman Empire after the death of Theodosius I (395 A.D.). The rupture became clear in 1054 with the controversies between the Pope's legates and the Patriarch of Constantinople (modern Istanbul). This first great division of Christendom was more political than doctrinal. Apart from the rejection of the supreme authority of the Pope of Rome, little really religious divides the Orthodox from the Roman Church.

Within the Western Church, a deeper division took place in the sixteenth century and developed further in the successive centuries. This was the 'Reformation', which started in Germany and soon spread through much of central and northern Europe and England. The main leaders of the separatist or 'reformed' party were Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Melanchton. Eventually in England Henry VIII followed suit. This division entailed not only the rejection of the Pope but also of many changes in the doctrinal and later in the moral expressions of Christianity. The Reformation was, however, not primarily a movement of division but of purification. What the reformers wanted was the correction of abuses that had entered into the Christian way of life. But as a side-effect a division of Christendom took place.

We have, therefore, at present three main bodies or groups of churches in the Christian world: the various churches of Eastern Europe and the Middle East, of which the Orthodox Church is the most representative; the Roman Catholic Church governed by the college of bishops with the

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Pope as head; and the various forms of reformed or Protestant Churches, some of which are quite close in belief and practice to the other two traditions (e.g., the Anglican Church), and others which have developed along new lines of doctrine and practice.

The Church in India

India has been the victim of these divisions of Christendom in the West. The first communities in India were part of the universal, undivided Church of antiquity. Such was the Malabar Church, in close contact with the Christian communities in Persia from where bishops had come in the early centuries. A solid tradition and strongly felt conviction is that St. Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus, is the originator of this Church. In the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church appeared on the scene. When the missionaries that came with the Portuguese met the Christian communities of Kerala, they compared notes on each other's faiths and practices. There was first a period of mutual recognition and acceptance, but as could be expected at a period when communication was still very difficult, many misunderstandings and frictions arose. Eventually, part of the Church in Kerala acknowledged its communion with the Pope of Rome, while another part refused to accept it because it saw it as a threat of 'Latinization'. Thus there emerged in Kerala the Jacobite Church, in direct communion with the Syrian Jacobite Church and the Catholic Church. From the former, the Mar-Thomas Church emerged in the 19th century. The Catholic Church consists of three different 'rites' (traditions and modes of worship): the Syro-Malabar, the Syro-Malankara and the Latin rites. Although there are differences between these rites, there is no division in faith, and one notices a growing cooperation and awareness of their oneness. The Christian Church in Kerala has also spread to North India and brought with it its traditions and rites. Many of its priests and nuns have volunteered for work elsewhere in India and abroad. Several dedicated persons from the Church in Kerala have attained a high degree of holiness, like the Venerable Sister Alphonsa (1910-1949) and Fr Kuriackos Chavara (1815-1871), founder of the monastic order of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. The whole Christian Church in North India, and indeed the country, owes a great debt of gratitude to the services of the Malabar Church.

This Latin branch of the Roman Catholic Church is spread throughout the country. It became firmly established in the sixteenth century mostly along the Western and Southern coasts of the country. Two important groups were then formed: the Goan-Mangalorean-Maharashtrian communities which became somewhat Westernised in language and culture, and the Tamil community which kept closer to their ancient language and traditions. The Churches of the Western Coast have been, with the Kerala Christians, the main agents in the educational, social and medical services offered in many regions of India. They have produced outstanding patriots like the freedom fighter Kaka Baptista; important literary works like the *Krista Purana* of Fr. Stephens in early Marathi (early seventeenth cen-

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tury); and reputed artists like Angelo Fonseca and Trinidade. Also saintly men of this community have given religious inspiration, like the Venerable Joseph Vaz (1651-1710), a missionary of Sri Lanka, and Fr. Agnelo de Souza (1869-1927) of the Missionary Society of St. F. Xavier, Pilar, in Goa, and St. Gonzalo Garcia, a Franciscan martyr for the Christian faith in Japan in the sixteenth century.

In the history of the Tamilian Church, one of the most important events is the effort of Robert De Nobili (1577-1656) for a greater indigenisation of Christianity. Already in the sixteenth century he learned not only Tamil, but also Telugu and Sanskrit, adopted a *sannyasi* way of life and defended the customs of the Brahmins of that time as compatible with the Christian faith. His writings on the outcome of the Brahmins for his Roman authorities in the early seventeenth century give an astonishing amount of information about contemporary Hinduism in South India. Many companions followed his example and through their inspiring and saintly form of life, many caste people came to believe in Jesus Christ. Among them, Nilakantha Devasagayam Pillai (1712-1752) is reserved as a martyr. The first printed books in Indian languages came from this Christian community and classics of Tamil literature like C. Beschi's *Thembavani* (1726) are even today studied in South Indian universities.

In the following centuries, the Roman Catholic Church established new important communities among the caste people of Andhra (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and among the tribals of Bihar and Assam (nineteenth and twentieth centuries), and among the scheduled castes in several parts of India, specially in the Gangetic plain (twentieth century). The Anglo-Indians generally belong either to the Roman Catholic Church or to the Protestant Church.

Not that Christians were absent from North India before the nineteenth century. Apart from the early centres in contact with the Syrian Church, already in the sixteenth century the great Moghul emperor Akbar requested the presence of some Jesuit priests at his court to discuss religious matters. To these priests we owe some of the most fascinating historical accounts of life at the court of the Moghul emperors, as, for example, in Fr. Montserrate's memoirs (1582 and 1590). Thanks to a *farmaan* from Akbar, a small church was built at the Agra court around 1599. Later generations of missionaries continued to be accepted in the country, and to them we owe, among other cultural contributions, the first Sanskrit grammar written in a Western language, in Latin, by Roth nearly a century and a half before the better known grammar of Colebrooke in 1805.

Meanwhile Protestant Christianity also made its appearance in India first with the arrival at Tranquebar of B. Ziegenbalg of the Lutheran Mission in 1706 and later with the landing in Calcutta of William Carey in 1793 who settled in Serampore, West Bengal from 1800. To these churches

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and the many others that followed them in the succeeding centuries specially once the missionary societies were formed in the Protestant countries, we owe a great deal in the development of regional languages and printing in India, particularly because of their concern for early translations of the Bible. These churches also paved the way for a growth of literacy all over the country and many of the most respected educational institutions of India were started under their patronage. One can truly say that the renaissance of India inaugurated by Raja Rammohan Roy in Bengal owes much to the work of these Christian churches. Among the outstanding mystics and saintly people of the Protestant Churches, we must remember Sadhu Sunder Singh (1889-1929), Narayan Seshadri (1820-1891), Narayan Vaman Tilak (1861-1919), Dhanjibhai Naoroji (1820-1908) and the Rev. Imad-ud-Din (1822-1900) (cf. P.J. Thomas, *100 Indian Witnesses to Jesus Christ,* Bombay, 1974). A number of Protestant Christians, notably C. F. Andrews, worked side by side with Gandhiji in the struggle for social reform and political independence.

ECUMENISM

The Christian Church is divided. But from the early part of this century, a movement towards reunion, called 'ecumenism', has been felt all over the world and notably among the various churches in India. The first step in this movement of reunion was the realization by many of the churches that they had indeed much in common, that the elements of faith and worship that they shared were far more important than those which divided them. Most importantly, they all considered the living memory of Jesus Christ as the very centre of the Church's life. Then coordination and co-operation among various churches were achieved through the formation of councils — particularly the National Christian Council of India (1914) and the Geneva-based World Council of Churches (1948). India has been in the front line of ecumenism: In 1908, three churches united into the South Indian United Churches; in 1947 a more significant union of this with Anglican and Methodist Churches took place to form the Church of South India (CSI); and in 1971 six important churches in the North formed the Church of North India (CNI).

Church Organization and Prayer Life

The divisions within the Christian church have given rise to diverse forms of church structure and organization. However, underlying most of the differences, there exists a recurring pattern. The basic unit of the Church is a sufficiently large geographical area, often called diocese, under the authority of a person called bishop, or supervisor, or known by some similar name. He is the religious authority in the area, although many churches have various forms of democratic structure which modify the functioning of his authority. Very often he is assisted by a group of sub-ordinate leaders generally called priests, ministers, pastors, etc., and by other helpers like deacons. Many of the churches hold occasional gather-

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ings of all bishops and important leaders, which conference is accepted as the supreme legislative body of that church. Besides this structure, the Roman Catholic Church has a world head or authority in the person of the Bishop of Rome, called the Pope. Bishops, priests and other ministers are chosen and appointed to be spiritual guides to help the community and its individual members to grow in their religious understanding and living of the Christian life, and they are particularly expected to continue that 'preaching of the Kingdom of God' which Jesus and his disciples had started.

The method of appointing ministers and bishops varies in the different churches. In no case are these offices hereditary. The responsibility of leadership is given, by nomination or by election or through some similar process, to one person who is willing to assume it either for life or for a given period of time. The community prays that God's special grace may be given to the new leader for the due fulfilment of his religious functions within the community. In this sense many of the churches consider the office of leadership as conferred by God Himself through the choice of the Church; the religious rite of conferring this office is considered as a 'sacrament' deriving ultimately from Jesus Christ.

Besides the above structure of authority and leadership, the Roman Catholic and a few other churches have various groups of men or women who voluntarily, and at their own initiative, devote their whole life to an exclusive service of God. They are called 'religious' Brothers (or Fathers if they are priests) and Sisters or nuns. This dedication supposes a sufficient human maturity in the person and is not permitted to children. Only after a period of testing does the community allow the candidate to assume definitely this form of consecrated life, if he or she is capable of living it with joy and peace. The candidate makes before the community three solemn promises or vows to God, of life-long celibacy, life-long subordination and obedience to the authority in the order, and life-long renunciation of all personal ownership of goods, assuming a form of community life. The purpose of this renunciation is to enable him or her to live a life of poverty of heart and single-minded dedication after the example of Jesus who lived as a poor man dedicated to God.

This kind of life is one of a sort of *sannyasa* and implies a certain mystical awareness of a call from God to the person involved. These men and women are called to a life of intense prayer and an effort to live with great purity of heart so as to experience their union with God and to imitate in all things the inner pattern of the life of Jesus. In India alone, there are about 200 such 'orders' or congregations with a total membership of over 50,000 men and women. Some of them were founded in India itself, but most form part of world-wide groups. One of the best-known congregations is that of the Missionaries of Charity founded by Mother Theresa in Calcutta in 1950 for the service of the most destitute and forlorn members of society.

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Some of these orders or congregations, however, are 'contemplative'. Their exclusive aim is to live to the full what is the underlying ideal for every religious person and indeed for every Christian: the life of contemplation, of worship and union with God. All Christians are enjoined to pray and to pray often. Although no fixed times are enjoined, many Christians pray on getting up in the morning and before going to sleep. Others pray more frequently and in a more prolonged way. For them prayer means not merely being absorbed into the mystery of God, but more importantly surrendering to God's plan for themselves and for others so as to make it part of their lives. One of the most beloved and basic prayers, repeated daily by millions of Christians, was taught by Jesus himself to his disciples and expresses the basic thrust of the Christian worship:

Our Father who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespassed against us;
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen. **(Matthew 6:9-13)**

Besides this form of spoken prayer or *japa,* Christians endeavour to awaken in themselves a vivid awareness of God's presence and action by many forms of worship. A very popular form consists in the reading of some passages from the Bible and letting one's mind rest in what it says, and, through this, feeling the presence and love of God. In the higher forms of mystical prayer, the worshipper will let his mind reach a very deep peace and silence and a sense of deep union with the God of love, whose presence fills the universe and becomes more and more pervading, so that the finite world fades into practical nothingness before the marvellous beauty of the uncreated reality. The great masters of contemplation in the Christian tradition, people like 'Dyonisius', St Augustine, St Benedict, Meister Eckart, St Bernard, St John of the Cross, St Teresa of Avila, and others. In recent years a new interest has been shown in prayer and very useful books are being published all over the world, like in India, *Prayer* by Swami Abhishiktananda.

A special characteristic of Orthodox and Catholic Christian life is a special attachment and devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who is invoked as 'Mother of God'. She is not considered a goddess, a *devi,* but the human mother of Jesus in whom God is present to us. She is seen as the inspiration and model of Christian life and *bhakti* and as a help to go to Jesus.

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A characteristic prayer addressed to her is:

Hail, Mary, full of grace
The Lord is with Thee.
Blessed art Thou amongst women
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners,
Now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

THE BIBLE

Whatever be their denominational differences, Christians share not only the living memory of Jesus Christ, but a common sacred writing, the Bible or Holy Scripture. A great love of the Bible has been expressed in the twenty centuries of Christian history. Probably no other book has had a deeper influence on any civilization than the Bible on Christendom. No other book has surely been so much copied, illustrated, printed, studied, commented upon, analysed and paraphrased as this text, the first complete book ever to be printed way back in 1456. In most Christian prayer meetings portions of this book are read out and often commented on. In the Bible Christians find not merely a historical account of the life and teachings of Jesus, a record of the past. For them the Bible is a living book today: God's own Word resounds whenever these pages are read with faith and devotion.

This belief does not imply that the Bible is not a work of human authors, or that God 'dictated' its contents to men. Christians are aware and accept that the Bible is clearly the work of human minds and is written in very human languages of 20 or 25 centuries ago — Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, often in a very beautiful style, but at times in quite clumsy expressions. Through these words and styles of individual men, God's own word, His call and His presence come to meet man. This is the reason why Christians love and revere the Bible. However, for them the Bible never takes the place of Jesus Christ. In this sense, Christianity is not primarily a religion of the book, but a religion of Jesus.

The Bible is not in fact a 'book' in the modern sense of the word, but a collection of 73 writings dating from about the ninth century B.C. to the end of the first century A.D. The writings in the Bible are divided into two main sections: the 'Old Testament', with 46 writings and the New Testament ' with 27. The Old Testament, nearly four times as long as the New Testament, corresponds to the Bible of Judaism and for Christians forms the background to and preparation for the New Testament which alone refers directly and historically to the person of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament writings consist first of a record of historical experiences of a people, the race of 'Israel'. The various vicissitudes in the history of Israel and the awareness its religious leaders had that God came to them as Saviour and that God is always faithful in His promises of mercy and love form the core of Old Testament literature. The most important

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event is the 'Exodus' or escape to freedom of a band of slaves working in Egypt. To this historical core were added the writings of the prophets, who between the eighth and third centuries B.C. appeared in the history of Israel to explain to the people the religious meaning of the events in their national and political life. They constantly brought the people face to face with their infidelity, their oppression of the weak, their sinfulness, and reminded them of the demands for goodness and justice on the part of God, their Saviour. Further, a collection of prayers or 'psalms' and other songs, often used in the public worship of the Jews, was also added to the Bible. These show a great sense of *bhakti*, and express feelings of trust, faith, love, repentance, etc. Another group of writings of the Old Testament expresses the deeper religious beliefs of the people regarding the origins of mankind (creation accounts) and of suffering (the 'Fall') and the meaning of history as progressing towards a great manifestation of 'the Day of the Lord' ('Apocalyptic' literature). Finally, some stories and 'Wisdom' literature express the practical implications of a life of faith and dedication to God.

The New Testament consists of:

1. Four Gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John on accounts of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as experienced by his closest disciples;

2. A historical account of the earliest preaching in the Christian communities and the establishment of Christianity in the countries around the eastern Mediterranean Sea (the *Acts of the Apostles*, probably written by Luke);

3. Twenty-one letters or writings of the early disciples of Jesus, notably those of an outstanding mystic and thinker, St. Paul; which express the meaning of the person and work of Jesus and exhort the Christian communities to live their new faith enthusiastically; and

4. Finally, there is a symbolic writing, the book of 'Revelation' or 'Apocalypse': its author endeavours to instil a sense of hope and courage in the early persecuted Christians, and uses very colourful symbols which are difficult to understand or interpret today.

All these writings, in spite of their heterogeneity, possess a clear religious unity, a common outlook on man and his relationship with God and a consistent view of the way of life based on Christian faith. Their teaching and symbols form the warp and woof of Christian culture. The Bible has been translated into all the known languages of the world, and new translations are made each year. In English, the well-beloved King James version (the 'authorised' version) dates only from the seventeenth century. Today more updated translations are normally used.

In India, the burden of Bible translation and publication has mostly fallen on Protestant churches. The first printed Bible was a Tamil translation by Zieganbalg and Schultze in the early eighteenth century (NT in

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1715; OT in 1726). But the most impressive effort was made from Serampore in Bengal, where William Carey ably assisted by Ward and Marshman published no less than 40 Bible translations between 1800 and 1834. Not all these translations are of high quality, but some became important contributions to the growth of the Indian languages. The process of correction and more faithful translation is constantly going on in all the languages and generally with the cooperation of all churches. Today the Bible is available in part or in whole in no less than 32 Indian languages.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

Once, towards the end of Jesus' life, a pandit went up to him and put him this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?' Jesus answered:

> **You must love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. The whole Law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets depend on these two commandments.**
>
> **(Matthew 22.36-40).**

This precise, very definite teaching of Jesus is the dominating ideal of the Christian vision of life. Man is made to *love,* and love means self-dedication, self-gift, self-sacrifice. The object of man's love is first and foremost God, who alone is fully worthy of love and who Himself creates and saves man in love. The purpose of the Christian existence is to make this love come true in one's life. Life eternal, which will extend beyond death, will be the flowering of this love in the presence of God Himself, experienced without any obstacle.

But this love for God finds its concrete expression in the love for other men. Nobody can love God who does not love his fellowmen. And thus the service of man is always in-built in the Christian religious ideal. All the activities and attitudes of men are ultimately judged by this single law of love; all efforts to promote great social justice in the world, all work for the building up of a new humanity where the unique dignity of each man is respected and where all have equal opportunities, all the struggle for the liberation of man from individual and structural oppression, every form of human activity, has a religious value if it is inspired by this law of love.

In our world of clash and struggle, this law of love cannot be lived without a good deal of self-denial, of acceptance of sufferings, persecutions, and sacrifices that life may demand. We are called upon not to be frightened by them. Suffering has a mysterious value when mingled with love, for in suffering love manifests all its beauty. This is why the simplest and most powerful symbol of Christianity is the Cross: on this sign of torture and of shame Jesus, the Son of God, hung and gave His life in the fulness of love for God and for man. Through it, new life came to Him and to all of us. Through His cross, Christians hold, salvation comes to all men and this is exactly what Christians celebrate in their Sunday worship.

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The Scriptures

A Prayer of Trust

The Lord is my shepherd,
there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.
Near restful waters he leads me,
to revive my drooping spirit.

He guides me along the right path;
he is true to his name.
If I should walk in the valley of darkness
no evil would I fear.
You are there with your crook and your staff;
with these you give me comfort.

You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.
My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing.

Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me
all the days of my life.
In the Lord's own house shall I dwell
for ever and ever.

Psalm 22. The Grail version

The Freedom of Man

Jesus was walking through the cornfields on a Sabbath-day. His disciples, as they walked along, began to pluck the ears of corn. The Pharisees said to him: 'Why are they doing what may not legally be done on the sabbath?' 'Have you never read,' he said to them, 'what David did, when he and his friends were hungry and needed food? Don't you know the story of how he went into the house of God, when Abiathar was High Priest and ate the sacred loaves, which are placed in the presence of God and which legally only the priests may eat and gave them to his companions as well? The sabbath,' he said to them, 'was made for the sake of man and not man for the sake of the sabbath. So the Son of Man's authority extends over the sabbath too.'

Jesus went into the synagogue again and there was a man there whose hand was withered. They were watching Jesus closely to see if he would heal on the sabbath, for they wanted to find something which they could use as a charge against him. Jesus said to the man with the withered hand: 'Get up, and stand where everyone can see you! Whether is it permitted,' he said to them, 'to help or to hurt on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' They remained silent.

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His gaze swept round them and there was anger in his eyes, for he was saddened by the imperviousness of their hearts. 'Stretch out your hand!' he said to the man. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored to health. Thereupon the Pharisees went out and began to concoct a scheme with Herod's supporters to kill Jesus.

The Gospel of St. Mark, Ch. 2.23-3.6

The Great Hope

All who follow the leading of God's Spirit are God's own sons. Nor are you meant to relapse into the old slavish attitude of fear—you have been adopted into the very family circle of God and you can say with a full heart, 'Father my Father.' The Spirit himself endorses our inward conviction that we really are the children of God. Think what that means. If we are his children, then we are God's heirs, and all that Christ inherits will belong to all of us as well! Yes, if we share in his sufferings, we shall certainly share in his glory.

In my opinion whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has in store for us. The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own. The world of creation cannot as yet see reality, not because it chooses to be blind, but because in God's purpose it has been so limited—yet it has been given hope. And the hope is that in the end the whole of created life will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay and have its share in that magnificent liberty which can only belong to the children of God!

It is plain to anyone with eyes to see that at the present time all created life groans in a sort of universal travail. And it is plain, too, that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit are in a state of painful tension, while we wait for that redemption of our bodies which will mean that we have realised our full sonship in him. We were saved by this hope, and let us remember that hope always means waiting for something that we do not yet see. For whoever hopes when he can see? But if we hope for something we cannot see, then we must settle down to wait for it in patience.

The Spirit also helps us in our present limitations. For example, we do not know how to pray worthily, but his Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonising longings which cannot find words. He who knows the heart's secrets understands the Spirit's intention as he prays according to God's will for those who love him.

Moreover, we know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good. For God, in his foreknowledge, chose them to bear the family likeness of his Son, that he might be the eldest of a family of many brothers. He chose them long ago; when the time came he called them, he made them righteous in his sight and then lifted them to the splendour of life as his own sons.

Letter of St. Paul to the Romans Ch. 8. 14-30.

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Festivals

Ash Wednesday (February or March): It marks the beginning of Lent, a 40-day period of special purification and penance leading to the celebration of Easter. It is a memory of the 40 days in which Jesus fasted in the desert before he began to preach. There is a custom of placing ashes on the heads of worshippers as a symbol of repentance.

Holy Week (March or April): The great week of the year, it celebrates the memory of the last week of Jesus. The most important days in it are:

Palm Sunday: In many places a small procession of Christians carrying palms or tree branches is organised in remembrance of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem five days before he was killed there.

Maundy Thursday: A day of intimacy, it remembers the last meal of Jesus with his 12 apostles in which he washed their feet and instituted the Eucharist.

Good Friday: The memory of the passion and death of Jesus on the cross. It is spent as a day of fasting, reading sermons on the death of Jesus, and keeping company with Jesus in his last sufferings. It is called 'good' because the events of this day are believed to be the source of man's salvation.

Easter Sunday: The most important celebration of the year, it recalls the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the establishment of God's kingdom of love and forgiveness. It is a day of great joy when good wishes are exchanged among Christians.

Ascension (normally a Thursday in May): It remembers that the risen Lord was seen by his disciples as taken up into the heavenly glory in body and spirit.

Pentecost Sunday (May or June): Fifty days after Easter, it celebrates the beginning of the Christian church by a special experience of the spirit of God by the disciples of Jesus.

St. Thomas (July 3 or October 6): On this day Christians, especially from Kerala and Madras, celebrate the memory of one of the apostles of Jesus who is believed to have come to preach the Gospel in south India and whose tomb is venerated in Madras.

Assumption of Mary (August 15): This is a feast specially celebrated by Catholics in honour of the mother of Jesus whom they believe risen from the dead and taken up in glory with her Son. It celebrates therefore the glorification of the material universe which Christians look forward to, and in India it blends beautifully with Independence Day.

Nativity of Mary (September 8): Also a typical Catholic feast, it celebrates the birthday of Mary. Its importance derives from the fact that traditionally many popular pilgrimages to shrines of Mary (at Vellankanni, Tamil Nadu; Bandra in Bombay; Bandel near Calcutta) take place on this day.

All Saints' Day (November 1): Most days of the year Christians remember some special saint that has given an outstanding example of Christian life. But on this day many churches have some celebration in honour of all the saints, known or unknown. The feast stresses the solidarity of the community of believers with those who have already obtained salvation.

All Souls' Day (November 2): On this day Christians remember the dead, specially those of their own family. Visits to and special prayers in the cemetery are recommended. Graves are blessed and often adorned with flowers and candles. The feast stresses the firm Christian belief in the survival of all human

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beings beyond death, a sense of communion with them and a hope of their salvation through the mercy of God.

St. Francis Xavier's Day (December 3): This feast is celebrated specially in Goa in honour of a preacher who came from Europe in the 16th century and was an outstanding saint known for his spirit of self-denial and for his mystical gifts. The remains of his body are venerated by pilgrims throughout the year in the Church of Bom Jesu, Goa.

Christmas (December 25): This is the best known and most popular festival in the Christian calendar. Celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, it is a day of joy, of sharing, gift-giving, family visits and wishes (Christmas cards have now become very popular) and a special family meal. The customs of the crib building to recall the scene of the birth of Christ, of the Christmas tree and of Santa Claus are mediaeval European customs. East European and Middle Eastern churches often celebrate the feast on January 6, the 'manifestation (or *epiphany)* of Christ.'

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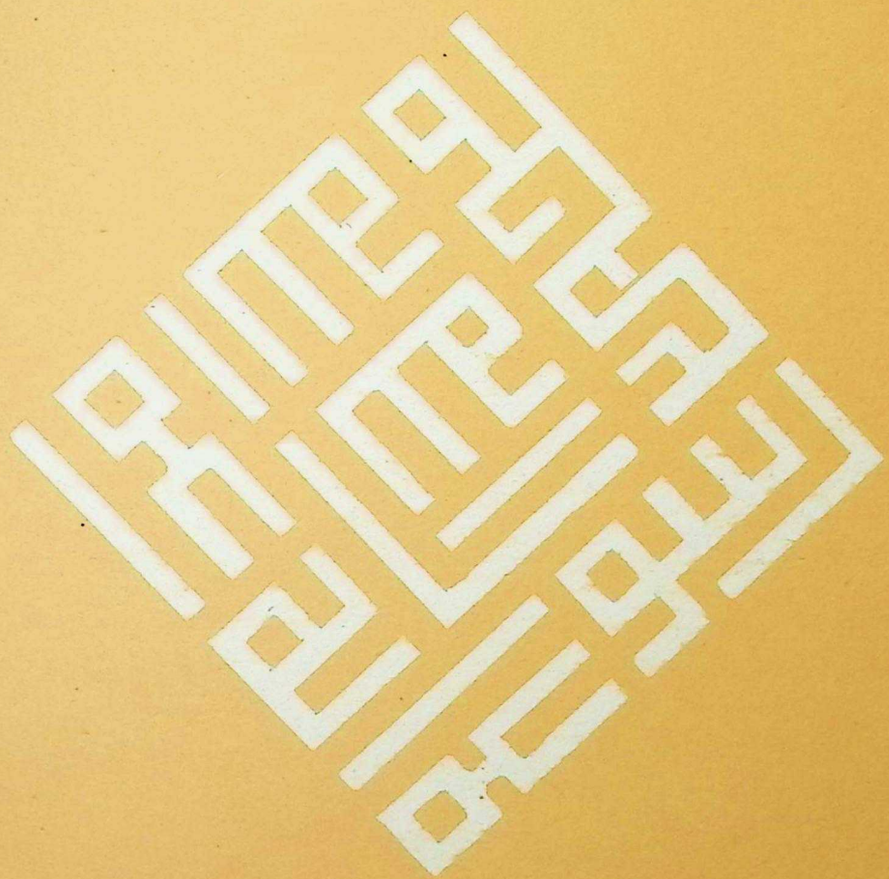

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝١

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝٢ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝٣

مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝٤ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ

نَسْتَعِينُ ۝٥ اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝٦

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ

عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝٧

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
Praise be to Allah who all the world made,
The Merciful, the Compassionate,
The king of the Day of fate.
Thee do we worship, and of Thee do we seek aid.
Guide us in the path that is straight,
The path of those to whom Thy love is great,
Not of those on whom is Thy hate,
Nor of those who deviate.

Al-Fatihah: The Quran 1-1-7

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Islam

What you have just read on the preceding page is the opening chapter of the Quran, called *Al-Fatihah.* Muslims recite it several times a day and night. The mere recitation will certainly remind man that before Allah, the Islamic equivalent of God, he is naught. He cannot walk even on a straight path without His guidance. Nor, without His mercy, can he check himself from going astray. He has, therefore, constantly to be on guard against divine wrath.

Since man cannot attain God without His help, God, in order to make Himself attainable, has from time to time been sending His guidance to him in different ways. The last time when He decided to make Himself known to the people, He chose the medium of the 'letter', that is the Quran, the Recital, in which He spoke to His people through Prophet Muhammad.

PROPHET MUHAMMAD

The Prophet, a few months after the death of his father, Abdullah, was born in the year 569 (Dec. 9, approx.) A.D. and was named Muhammad. As was the custom, his mother, Aminah, sent the baby with a nursing mother, Haleemah in order to have him brought up in the fresh air of the desert. Several miracles happened on his way to the desert and during his five years' stay there. A few months after his return, he lost his mother and was brought up by one of his uncles. In his youth he earned his livelihood by working as a commission agent to wealthy traders of Mecca, carrying their merchandise to other neighbouring cities. On one such occasion, he was

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employed by Khadijah, a rich widow of Mecca, to take charge of her trade caravan. Impressed by his honesty and fair dealings she, even though a few years senior to him, sought his hand in marriage.

Relieved of the necessity of earning his living, Prophet Muhammad now had time to give himself to reflection. In a cave in a nearby mountain called Hira, he spent hours and days in meditation. There he began to have strange experiences of a mystical nature. He saw visions and heard voices. It was in some such moment in the year 610 that there came to him the divine call, and he received his first revelation.

There are scanty references in the Quran as to how it was revealed for the first time. The details, however, are found in the books of *Hadith,* the collections of the Prophet's sayings and doings. It is stated that one night when, sitting in his usual hide-out, absorbed in his thoughts, he visualized someone standing before him, identified later as the archangel Gabriel, who asked him to recite in the name of his Lord. Aware of his limitations, the Prophet was at first hesitant, but as the angel persisted in his demand, words came out of his mouth:

Recite in the name of thy Lord who created,
Created man out of mere clot of congealed blood;
Recite and thy Lord is most bountiful,
He who taught the use of the pen,
Taught man that which he knew not. **(Q.96:1-5)**

This was a novel and strange experience which shook Mohammad completely. Shattered and trembling, he returned home and confided to his wife: 'Could it be that this was a call from God?' She was convinced that it certainly was. She was the first to believe in him as the true prophet of God. Confidentially he later told some of his close associates of his experience, and they too believed in him.

Thenceforth the Prophet continued receiving revelation throughout his life. Sometimes it was only one or two verses, and sometimes a whole *surah* like the twelfth one, consisting of one hundred and eleven verses.

When the Prophet told his townsmen that he was receiving revelation from God, they made fun of him. After listening to the Quran, some called him a poet, and others equated him with soothsayers and regarded him as one out of his mind. But the Quran exonerated him from such charges and declared: 'We have not instructed the Prophet in poetry' (36:69). 'O people, your companion is not one possessed' (81:22).

People were also sore about the fact that it was Muhammad, a relatively poor and uninfluential man of the town who was chosen for prophethood. Their criticism and objections are found in the Quran. They used to say: 'Why is not the Quran sent down to some leading man in either of the two chief cities?' (43:31). Or 'Say those without knowledge: why speaketh not God to one of us or why cometh not unto us a sign?' (2:118). Also, 'They say: we

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shall not believe until we receive one exactly like those received by God's apostles' (6:124).

In spite of their objections and criticisms, however, people started listening to the Quran and accepting it as the true revelation from God. The language and style of the Quran were so impressive that people found its message irresistible. The number of believers began increasing with such speed that those who opposed it were just startled. Finally, they tried to stop people from listening to the Quran by hooting them out (41:26). But that was all in vain, for in the final count, it is the truth which prevails.

THE QURAN

In a period of twenty-three years, the revelation was completed in the form of the present Quran which contains 114 surahs of varying lengths, 6,236 verses, 77,934 words and 3,23,621 letters. Unlike the first revelation, there is no unanimity among the Muslim scholars on the chronologically last verse revealed to the Prophet. The majority, however, is of opinion that the last two verses of surah 9 were revealed only nine days before the death of the Prophet; thereafter, he received none.

However, what lies between the first and the last revelation is a book which has undoubtedly influenced the religious, social and political history of mankind. Hardly can any scripture be compared with the Quran in its immediate impact upon the lives of the people who were its initial recipients. They, and after them the generations that followed them, have always found the Quran providing satisfactory answers to all their queries. It is quite possible that Muslims occasionally might have misconstrued the answer, or might have departed from the spirit of its message, but the fact remains that to the believers, the Quran always represents the ultimate manifestation of God's grace to man, the ultimate wisdom, and the ultimate beauty of expression; in short, the true word of God.

About the present textual arrangements of the Quran, the books of traditions say that the archangel Gabriel taught the Prophet the right place of each verse. The Prophet in turn used to tell his Companions where a particular verse was to go. Thus the Prophet left after him the Quran in the existing scheme of arrangement written on various pieces of objects which were immediately collected during the short reign of the first caliph and was copied in book-form.

Some people complain of frequent repetition in the Quran. In this connection, we should remember that the Quranic verses are of two kinds: legal and non-legal. Insofar as the legal verses are concerned, the Quran is direct and precise. It is only the non-legal verses wherein the message has been repeated. It was necessary. The Quran is meant to put man on the right path; therefore, monosyllabic orders were not enough. For the same reason, the Quran could not be arranged subjectwise. For, then, all the verses, say, dealing with the oneness of God, the prophethood, virtuous living, and so

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on, would have to be put together. Imagine how dull and boring reading it would have made!

When the non-Arabs began to embrace Islam, the necessity of putting diacritical marks on Quranic words for correct reading and translating the Quran into their languages was felt. The 'marks' were provided, but the Muslims were hesitant for some time in translating it into other languages, on the ground that the divine words were *untranslatable.* They, therefore, wrote only commentaries. Gradually, however, the translations began to appear, and today are available in almost all the languages of the world. In Indian languages only there are more than a hundred translations mostly by Muslims but some by non-Muslims also; they are in Urdu (92), Hindi (18), Gujarati (9), Telugu (3), Sanskrit (2), Gurmukhi (1), Bengali (6), Kannada (1), Sindhi (2), Punjabi (6), Marathi (1), Tamil (1), Malayalam (3), and Pushtu (14). And the number keeps on increasing.

The Quran emphasises the oneness of God and His concern about the spiritual and worldly welfare of man. Besides, it speaks of the creation of the world and specially of man, good and evil spirits, man's responsibility for his actions, the coming of the day of Judgement, the final account, rewards and punishments. In addition, we find in the Quran rules and regulations regarding worship and the life of the community, socio-economic laws, including special laws concerning family life such as marriage, divorce, inheritance etc. Several sets of commands are found scattered throughout the Quran. If arranged properly, they can be taken, like the Decalogue of Moses, as definite Quranic commandments. The most systematic group of these found in one place is in chapter 17, verses 22-37. They are:

Put not any other god with Allah
Be kind and respectful to parents, especially in their old age
Give what is due to kinsmen, the poor and travellers
Be not wasteful
Slay not your children for fear of poverty
Go not near fornication
Slay not the soul, which Allah has forbidden you to do, except for a just cause
Draw not near to the wealth of the orphan
Fulfil your contracts
Give just measure and weight
Follow not that of which you have no knowledge
Walk not on the earth proudly

THE PROPHET'S MISSION

So long as Prophet Muhammad, after receiving the revelation, carried on his mission in secret, all went well. Bitter opposition, however, arose when he publicly claimed that he was a prophet of God, and all were to follow him. As a prophet he was not a mere bearer of God's revelation, he was rather to convey it to others. A prophet's mission, as a matter of fact, does not end but begins with the recitation of the revelation. This has been

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clearly stated in the Quran:

> **He it is who hath sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelation and to make them grow and to teach them the scriptures and wisdom, though heretofore, they were indeed in error manifest. (Q.62:2)**

It then appears that Prophet Muhammad had before him three important tasks. First, he had to transmit the revelation to his fellowmen and explain to them its meaning and its implications. Second, he was to urge them to give up their evil practices and follow a life of piety, love and devotion. Third, he was, consequently, to establish a new society. For all these basic prophetic tasks, he had to come forward courageously. He, therefore, fearlessly attacked the Meccans' religious belief in idols which were housed in the 'House of God', the *Kaabah*. This they did not tolerate and the Prophet and those who believed in him were to bear the consequences. The persecution became so severe that the Prophet with his Companions had finally to move out of the city in A.D. 622 (on September 20, approx.) and settle down in Yithrib, later called Medina, a city about 200 miles north of Mecca.

Even in Medina, life for the Prophet and his local *(ansar)* and emigrant *(muhajir)* Companions was not peaceful. The local non-believing Arabs and the Jews finding themselves incapable of containing the rapid spread of Islam conspired with the people of Mecca, who themselves did not like to see a strong centre of their opponents established *en route* to their trade caravans. Soon skirmishes started taking place between the two groups. Finally, on the twelfth day of the third month of the 11th Hijra year (7 June 632) Mecca surrendered, and the Prophet became the master of the whole of Arabia.

Islamic World after the Prophet

When the Prophet died at the age of 63 in 632, history tells us that he left almost the whole of Arabia under the sway of Islam, with Medina as its capital. Immediately after his death, some neighbouring tribes revolted against the authority of the centre. Abu Bakr, the first successor of the Prophet, who remained on the scene for a little more than two years, took strong action and curbed the revolt. On his death in 634, Umar, the second successor, took charge. In his days, Islam went beyond the borders of Arabia. Syria and Jerusalem were conquered and by 637 he brought under Islamic control practically the whole region that had once constituted the Babylonian and Assyrian Empires. In 640 Egypt came under his control, and in 642 Persia fell before him. By the end of his caliphate in 644, Islam ruled from Egypt on the west to the borders of India on the east. During the remainder of that century, Muslim armies swept across the whole of North Africa, and in the year 711 entered Europe through Spain. Northward they pushed their way steadily until they occupied almost half of France.

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For about three decades after the death of the Prophet, Medina continued to be the centre of the Muslim world. When Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, became the fourth Caliph in 656, he moved to Damascus and made it the seat of the Caliphate. He was the last elected Caliph. After his death in January 661, the Islamic world was ruled by Muawiyah, the founder of the Umayyid dynasty, which lasted till 750. The Abbasids succeeded them and transferred the political centre of the Islamic world to Baghdad in Iraq. In the eleventh century, the Turks took up the cause of Islam and in the fifteenth century, they overran all of Asia Minor and swept into Europe through Constantinople. Steadily they advanced through Central Europe and reached up to Vienna in Austria.

In the Far East, Islam reached China in the 9th century where even today its followers number several million. Malaysia and Indonesia gradually became almost wholly Muslim. Evidences show that in the 16th century, Islam was already well established in the Philippine Islands. From the narrow rim around the north end of Africa, bordering the Mediterranean, Islam pushed outwards across the Sahara Desert, taking tribe after tribe of Africa into its fold.

The south of India (especially the Mopla region) was exposed to Islam through Arab traders as early as the first century of Islam (6th century AD). It is reported that one of the earliest Zamorin Kings of the area under the influence of the Arab traders plying between Arabia and Ceylon was converted to Islam and migrated to Mecca where he died (in *c.* 626 or 822 AD). Because of him the Muslims were welcomed and allowed to travel throughout the area explaining their faith and establishing (at least) nine mosques to each of which was attached a *qadi* to lead the prayers and decide their civil and family cases.

About 1000 AD having about three centuries earlier reached Afghanistan, Sind and Baluchistan, Islam entered the northern plains of India and within a comparatively short time, however, a great Muslim empire was built up with its capital at Delhi which was ultimately wiped out by the British in 1857.

In 1947 when India achieved independence, its Muslim population found itself divided into India and Pakistan. Muslims from the Indian provinces also started migrating to Pakistan; it was feared that in no time India would be a country *sans* Muslims. But this did not happen, migration stopped and specially after the emergence of Bangladesh, India became the second largest Muslim country of the world.

This is the story of the territorial expansion of Islam. This rapid expansion of Islam has created a sort of misunderstanding in the minds of people on the use of the sword in the spread of Islam. We must, however, remember that Islam does not approve of compulsion in the matter of religious faith. The Quran (2:256) clearly says: 'There is no compulsion in religion.' Still there exists too general a disposition on the part of many

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writers to charge Muslims with the use of the sword as a proselytising agency. The fact is that people usually do not distinguish between the political conquest of a religious community and wars to compel acceptance of religion as a faith. Otherwise the historians and scholars have unquestionably shown that much of the spread of Islam was by peaceful preaching.

The Authority of the Prophet

In Mecca, the Prophet had no power to implement what he was receiving from God. In Medina, the situation was different. The people of Medina had accepted him as their leader whose words were to be treated as law. The terms and conditions on which the people of Medina had agreed to follow the Prophet are significant in the sense that they laid the foundation of an organised society in which there was a political authority to deal with cases along with the authority of God which would operate in the next world. According to Ibn Hisham, the foremost biographer of the Prophet, those people of Medina who took the oath of allegiance to him had to promise:

> **We declare allegiance to the Prophet that we should associate nothing with God, not steal, not commit fornication, not kill our offspring, not slander our neighbours, not disobey him in what is right; if we fulfil this, paradise will be ours, and if we committed any of these sins,we should be punished in this world and this would serve as expiation; if the sin was concealed until the day of resurrection, then it would be for God to decide whether to punish us or to forgive us.**

The main difference, therefore, between the Meccan and Medinan periods was that in Mecca the Islamic injunctions were left to the good conscience of the individual; in Medina they were to be promulgated by an authority of law. In Mecca, the transgressors were to be dealt with only by the divine authority in the next world; in Medina, they were made accountable before the law, in addition to what they were going to reap in their next life.

If the commandments revealed in Medina are read in the light of the above-quoted oath of allegiance, it will remove many misunderstandings. It will then be clear that the so-called legal verses of the Quran dealing with various crimes and prescribing remedial procedures were for the benefit of those who were till then denied justice. Later the Quranic punishments became so much a matter of debate that their real purpose was lost sight of. That was, in fact, the introduction of the principle of equality before the law, a rather strange phenomenon for the Arabs. The pre-Islamic Arab society maintained a distinction between the high and the low even in matters of justice and law. The principle of equality before the law was so strange for them that when the Prophet once tried to demonstrate it in the case of a daughter of a chief of a powerful tribe who was accused of stealing, even the Companions were shocked. They went to the Prophet pleading her case and

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suggesting to him that she, because of her social status, be given some lighter punishment. The Prophet showed his displeasure by saying that had she been his own daughter, he would not have hesitated to administer justice to her.

Islam means complete submission to God. Anyone who surrenders himself before the will of God is a *muslim,* a submitter. This complete and unconditional submission is not, however, easy. One has to undergo severe ordeals. The state of real submission before God has been well described by a Muslim saint of India, Shaikh Fariduddin Shakarganj. Once he was asked about the *zakat* (prescribed poor-due) which, according to Islamic law, every Muslim has to pay for distribution among the poor at the rate of two-and-a-half per cent of his yearly savings, if it exceeds a certain amount. Shaikh Farid considered the rate merely a following of the letter of the law. To him it was better to keep only two-and-a-half per cent with oneself and give the rest in the name of God. The most praiseworthy, however, he said, were those who gave away all.

Besides the submission before God, it is stressed, one also has to accept Prophet Muhammad as the last prophet of God. In other words, a Muslim has to believe and confess that there is but one God, and Muhammad is His Prophet. Many may be found sharing this belief with the Muslims in the first part of the formula, but it is the latter half of it which distinguishes a Muslim from the people of other faiths.

ISLAM AND OTHER FAITHS

Contrary to what is generally believed, Islam recognises the existence of other religions of the world. It does not envisage that the entire humanity will embrace Islam. Muslims, therefore, are not allowed to convert others by force. Their only duty is to keep on conveying the message by word and by deed and hope for the best. This was true even in the case of the Prophet himself. The Quran consoled him when it found him disturbed on people refusing to accept his message. It said: 'Remind them, for you are but a remembrancer. You are not at all a warder over them.' (88:21, 22). The Quran has at places criticised the Jews and the Christians for their belief that none but people belonging to their group will enter paradise. The Quran rejects the idea, declaring it 'wishful thinking.' Salvation, in fact, is not confined to any particular group. It is for those who surrender before God and do right things. Such people will be rewarded by God, and there shall be no fear for them, neither shall they grieve. This, read with the above verse which describes the Prophet only as a remembrancer, will mean that salvation is a matter exclusively in the hands of God who is well above all prejudices and partisanship.

Prophet Muhammad, believe the Muslims, was not the first to whom God spoke; there had been many before him bestowed with this honour. The uniqueness of the Quranic revelation to Prophet Muhammad, Muslims hold, lies in the fact that this was complete and final; afterwards God did not, that

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أَفَإِن مَّاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ ۚ
وَمَن يَنقَلِبْ عَلَىٰ عَقِبَيْهِ فَلَن يَضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا ۗ
وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ ۝ (سورہ ال عمران آیت ۱۴۴)

۵ فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنتَ لَهُمْ ۖ وَلَوْ كُنتَ فَظًّا
غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ ۖ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ
وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ ۖ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ
عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ ۝ (سورہ ال عمران آیت ۱۵۹)

۶ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ۝ (سورۃ الانبیاء آیت ۱۰۷)

Since Islamic faith takes exception to presenting Prophet Muhammad by means of lines or photographs, some passages which speak of the Prophet in the *Quran* are given with their English translation.

1. Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Apostle of God and the seal of the Prophets. *XXXIII, 40.* 2. Muhammad is the Apostle of God; and those who are with him are strong against unbelievers; compassionate amongst each other. Thou wilt see them low and prostrate themselves (in prayers) seeking grace from God and His good pleasure *XLVIII, 29.* 3. Say: 'O men! I am sent unto you all as the apostle of God; to whom belongeth the domination of the heavens and the earth: there is no god but He: it is He that giveth both life and death. So believe in God and His apostle, the unlettered Prophet, who believeth in God and His words: follow him that (so) ye may be guided.' *VII, 158.* 4. Muhammad is no more than an apostle: many were the apostles that passed away before him. If he died or were slain, will ye then turn back on your heels? If any did turn back on his heels, not the least harm will he do to God, but God (on the other hand) will swiftly reward those who (serve him) with gratitude. *III, 144.* 5. (Addressing the Prophet, God says) This is part of the mercy of God that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or hard-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: So pass over (their faults) and ask for (God's) forgiveness for them and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou hast taken a decision, put thy trust in God, for God loves those who put their trust (in Him). *III, 159.* 6. We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all creatures. *XXI, 107*

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

① مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ اَبَآ اَحَدٍ مِّنْ رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلٰكِنْ
رَّسُوْلَ اللّٰهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيّٖنَ ؕ (سورة الاحزاب آیت ٤٠)

② مُحَمَّدٌ رَّسُوْلُ اللّٰهِ ؕ وَالَّذِيْنَ مَعَهٗۤ اَشِدَّآءُ عَلَى
الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَآءُ بَيْنَهُمْ تَرٰىهُمْ رُكَّعًا سُجَّدًا يَّبْتَغُوْنَ
فَضْلًا مِّنَ اللّٰهِ وَرِضْوَانًا (سورة الفتح آیت ٢٩)

③ قُلْ يٰۤاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اِنِّيْ رَسُوْلُ اللّٰهِ اِلَيْكُمْ
جَمِيْعَا ِالَّذِيْ لَهٗ مُلْكُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ ۚ
لَاۤ اِلٰهَ اِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيٖ وَيُمِيْتُ ۪ فَاٰمِنُوْا بِاللّٰهِ
وَرَسُوْلِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْاُمِّيِّ الَّذِيْ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللّٰهِ
وَكَلِمٰتِهٖ وَاتَّبِعُوْهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُوْنَ ۝ (سورہ اعراف آیت ١٥٨)

④ وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ اِلَّا رَسُوْلٌ ۚ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ ؕ

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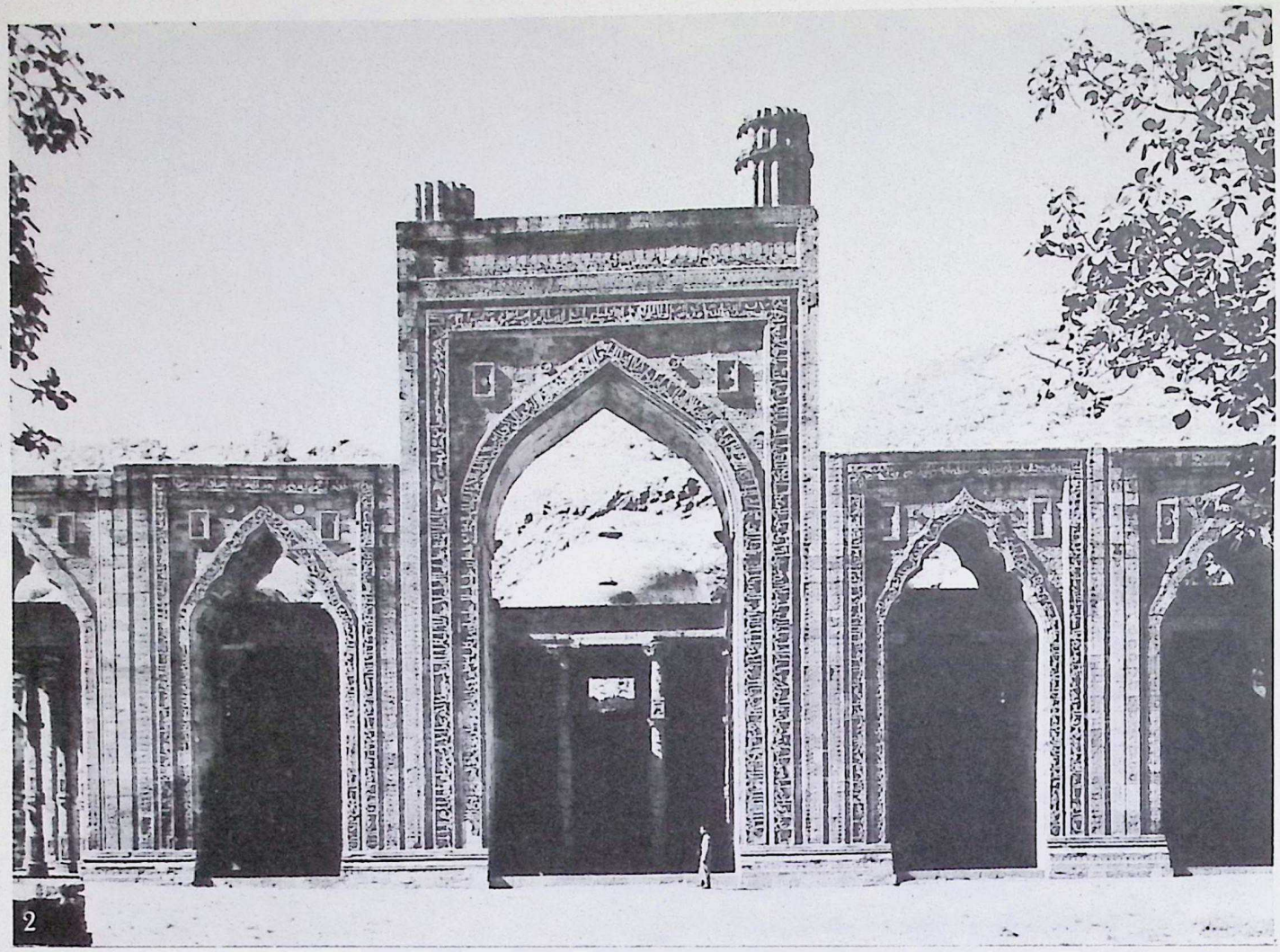

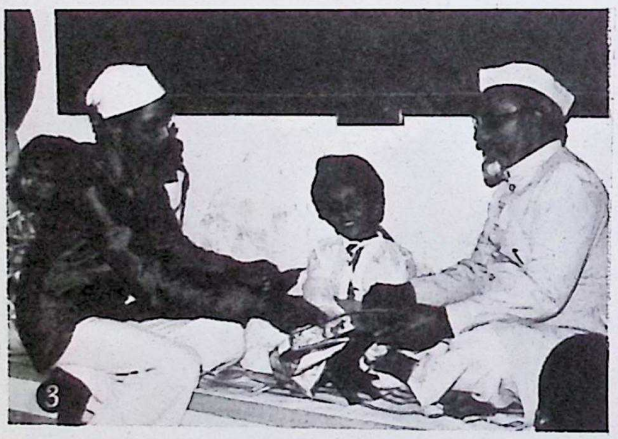

1. "When you judge between people, judge with justice." *(Quran 4.58).* The scales of justice painted on a marble screen at Delhi's Red Fort.

2 & 5. "Which then is better? He who lays his foundation on piety to God and His pleasure? Or he that lays his foundation on an undermined sand-cliff ready to crumble to pieces?" *(Quran 9:109).* Kufi and Naskh Quranic inscriptions on the facade of the Adhai-Din-ka-Jhonpara mosque in Ajmer.

3. "Read in the name of thy Lord." *(Quran 94.1).* A Muslim child receives his first lesson in the reading of the *Quran,* usually at the age of four.

4. The Hazratbal Mosque, Srinagar, Kashmir.

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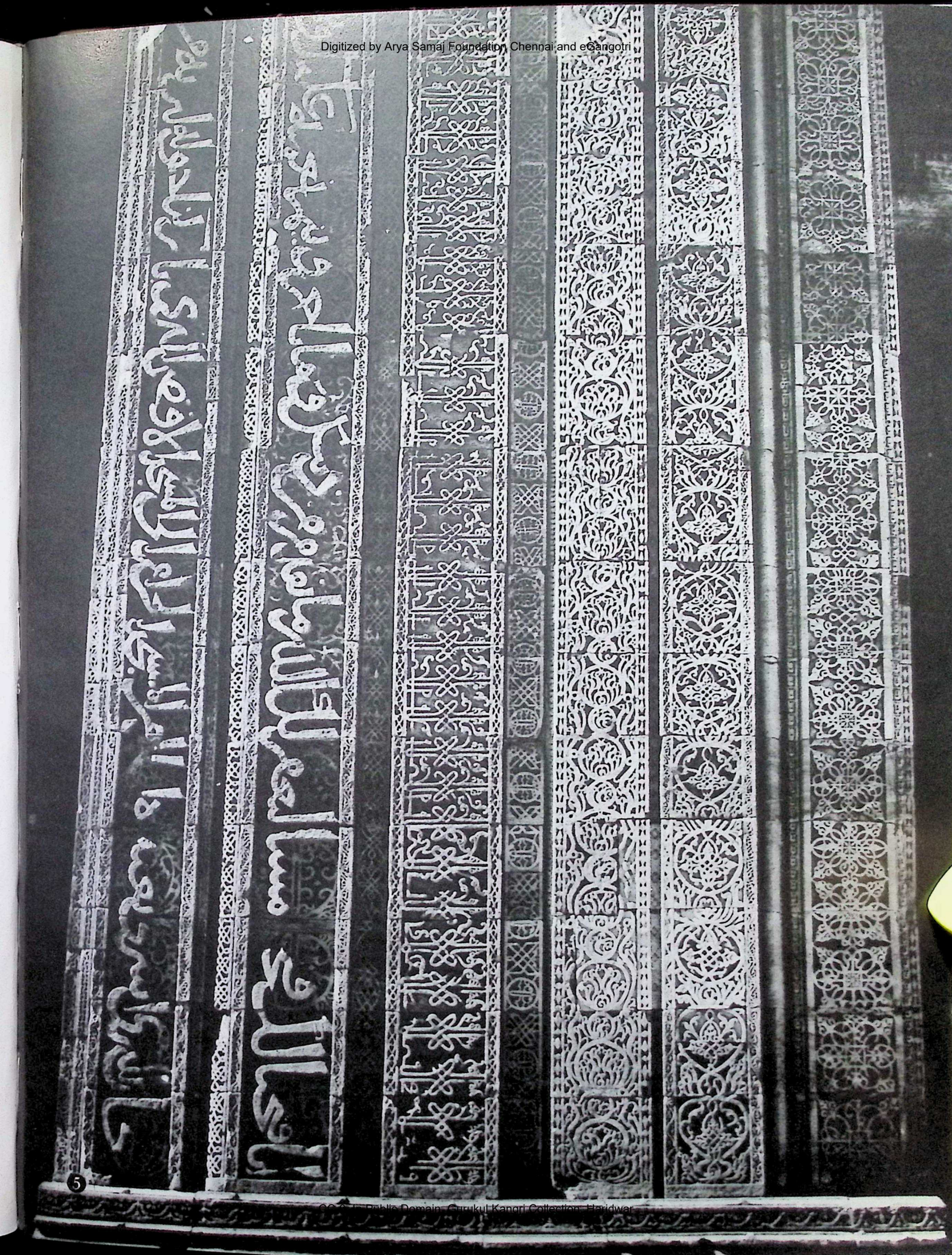

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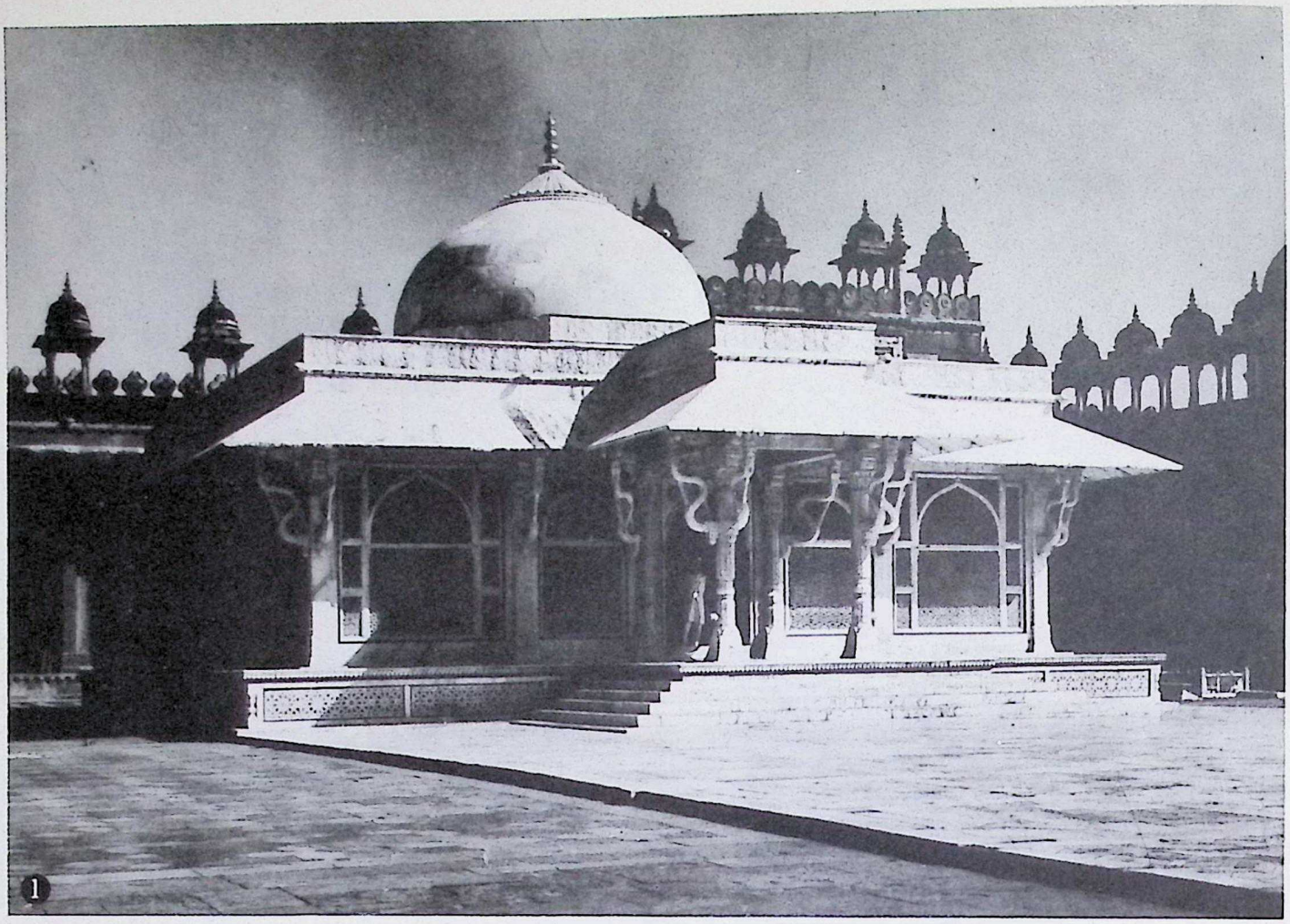

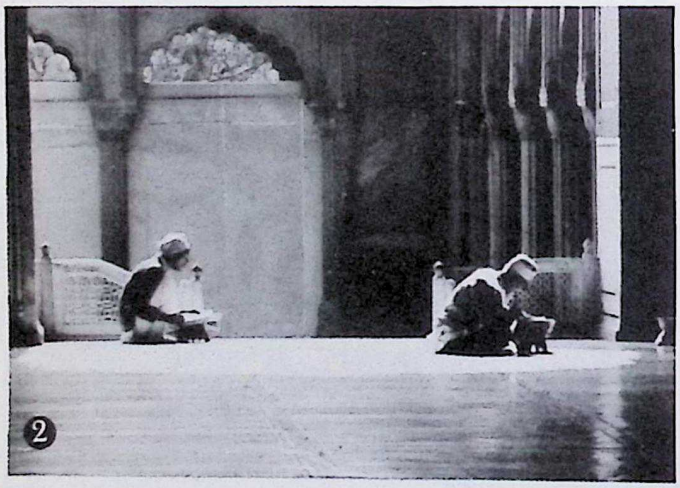

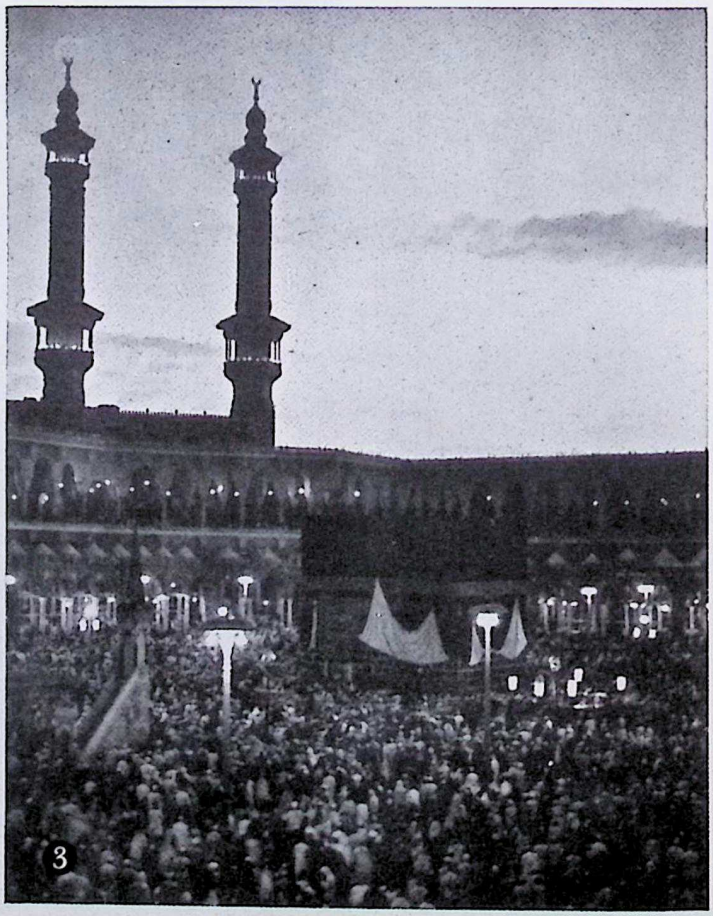

1. The marble mausoleum of Saint Hazrat Shaikh Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri near Agra.

2. Two devotees reading the *Quran* at a mosque.

3. "And pilgrimage to the house (of God) is a duty men owe to God." *(Quran 3.97).* Pilgrims at the Holy Ka'ba in Mecca at the time of Haj.

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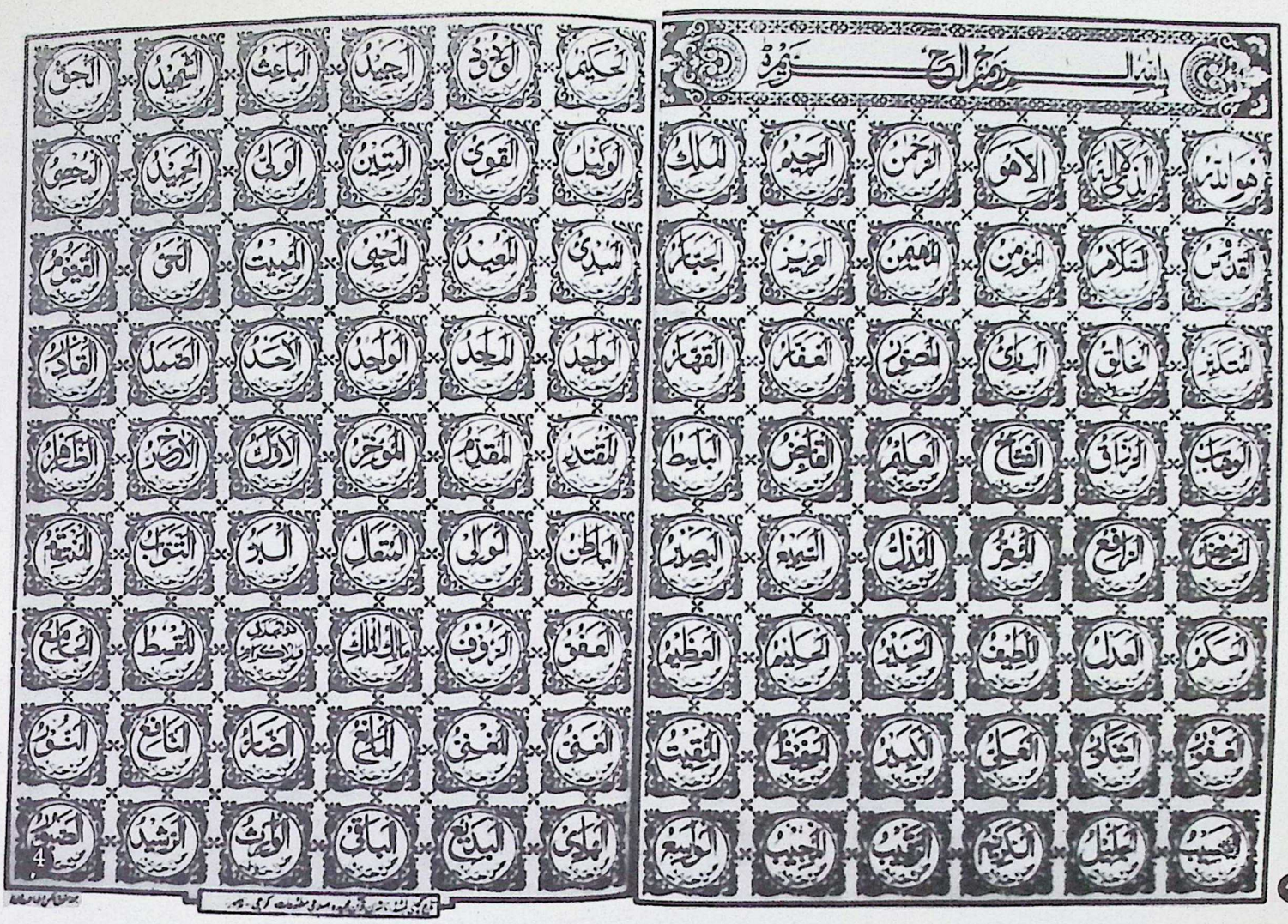

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4. "The most beautiful names belong to God." *(Quran 7.180)*. The 99 names of God, i.e. Al-Aziz—the majestic; Al-Halim—the clement; Al-Muhaimin—the guardian, etc.

5. "Nay, but it is a glorious *Quran* on a guarded tablet." *(Quran 85.21)*. The first page with beautiful calligraphy from the *Quran*.

6. "In the name of God, the kind, the beneficent, the merciful." *(Quran 27.30)*. "786" in Arabic is the chronogrammatic way of writing "In the name of God . . ." This practice is believed to be of Indian origin.

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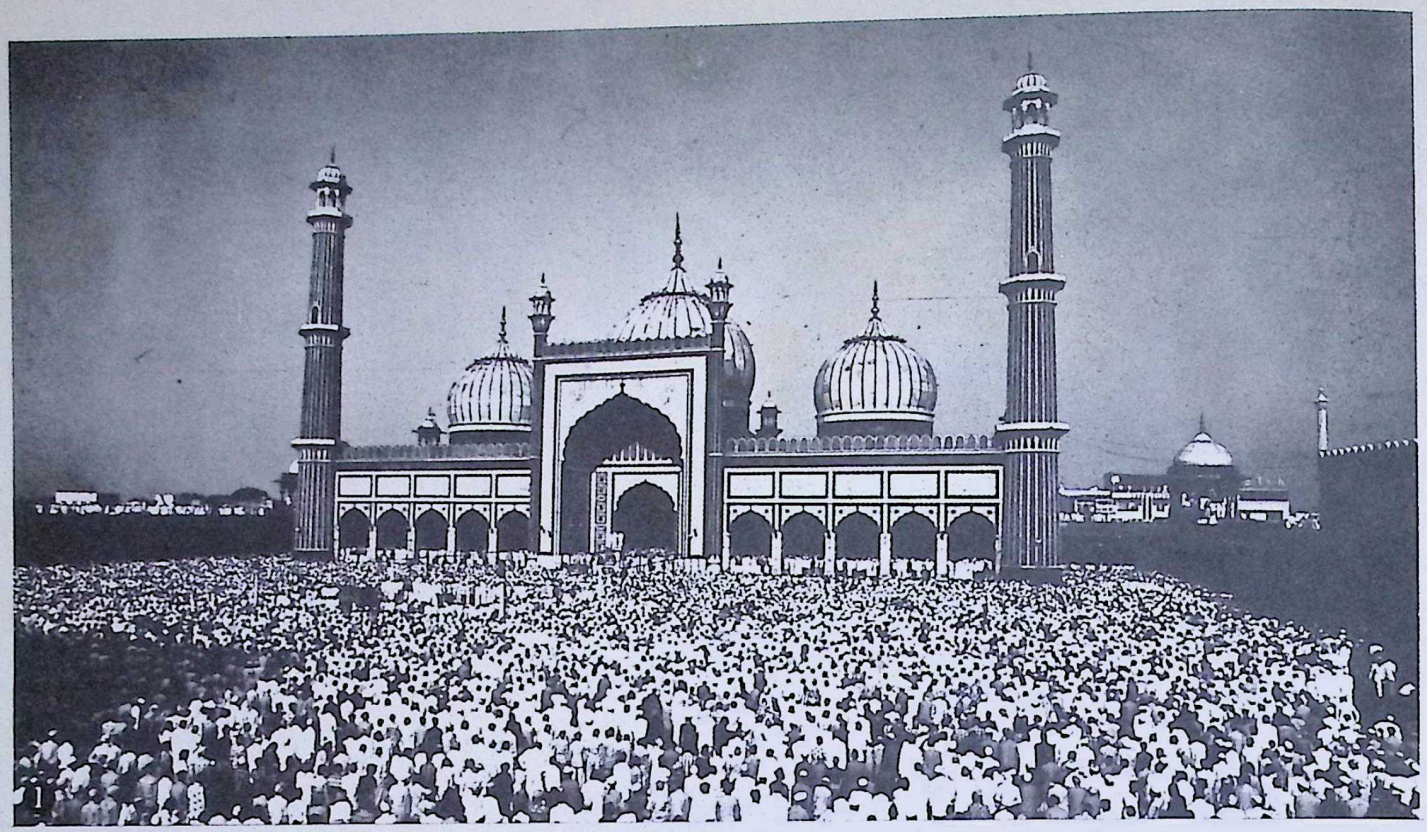
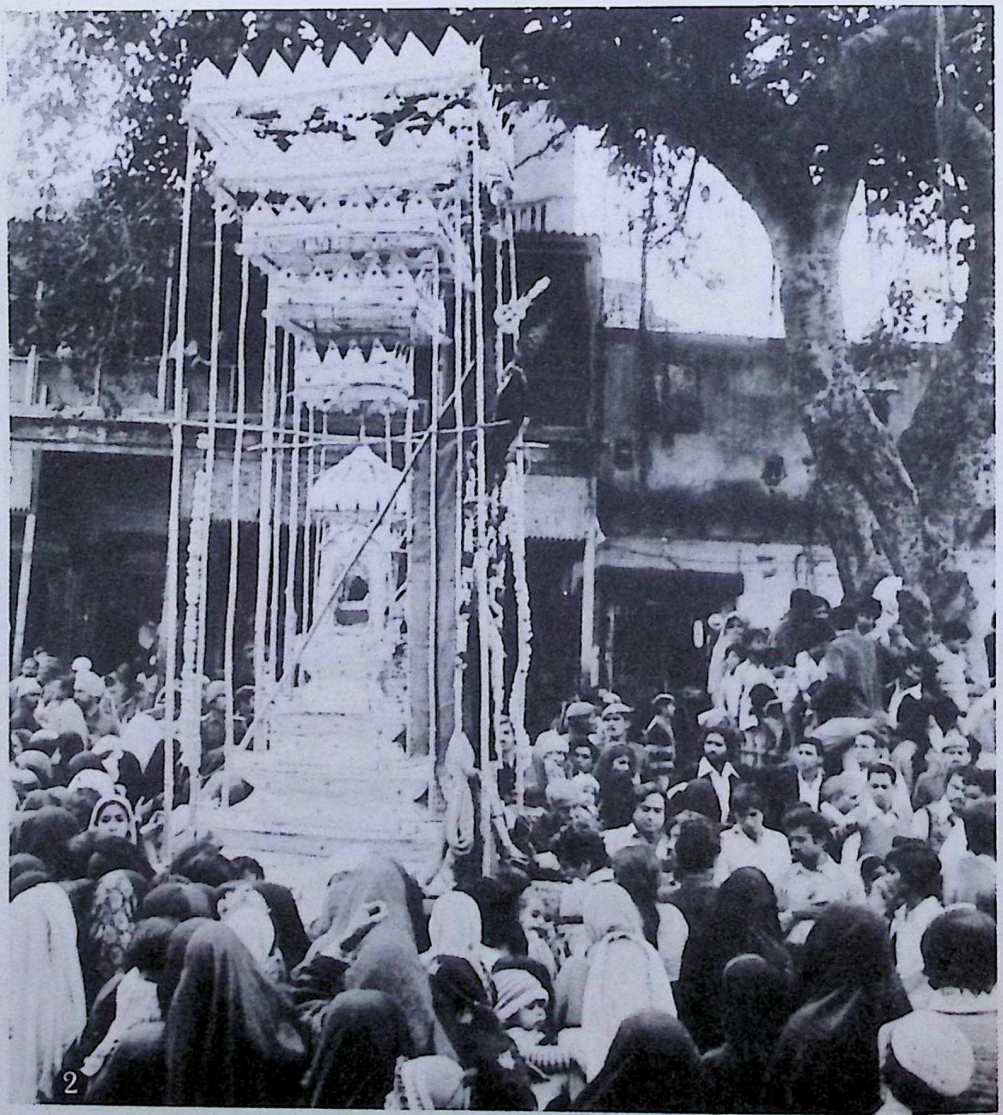


1. "O believers, when the call is given for prayer, hasten unto remembrance of God." *(Quran 62.9)*. Thousands gather to pray at Delhi's Jama Masjid during Id celebrations.

2. "Whatsoever good you send before you for yourself, you will surely find it with God." *(Quran 73.20)*. A Ta'ziah procession mourning the death of the Prophet's grandson during Muharram



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is a fact and certainly will not, that is how they believe, speak directly or indirectly to any human being. This final divine speech, however, does not negate the previous revelations; nor does it claim to be something new, something novel. This is the same which has been revealed before — but the recipients, the Quran says, had corrupted it. The question of corruption in divine scriptures is an important issue in Islamic theology. According to Muslim understanding, God has throughout human history been sending prophets and messengers to all parts of the world. So long as the people remained faithful to the revelation and did not corrupt the scriptures, the need for sending new messengers or prophets was not felt. It was only when the scriptures were vitiated that the prophets came. According to the Quran, all revelations which preceded it were distorted and altered by their followers. The Quran came to remind them that they should purify their own scriptures from all aberrations and accretions. Once this was done, the Quran says, they would see for themselves that their own religion and Islam were but identical.

The Quran cannot and will not be altered: God has promised it (Q.15: 9). History also bears testimony to this fact that so far not a single letter of the Quran has been changed. Hence no need of any prophet after Prophet Muhammad, the Muslims believe. The finality of the prophethood in him, however, does in no way imply that the Quran intends to prove his superiority to others: all are indeed equal except that in their particular areas of excellence, some excel others. By terminating the prophetic chain, God, in fact, has made every individual responsible for his own salvation. So long as the chain of prophethood remained operative, people used to look towards the heavens for an authority to come down and lead them. Man has now been liberated from this expectation, left free to choose between hell and heaven.

LAW IN ISLAM

The stress on the prophethood of Muhammad did not allow Islam to remain merely a body of individual religious beliefs. Religious individualism, in fact, was replaced in Islam by religious collectivism hallowed by the personality of the Prophet. Everything which developed in Islamic society had to have sanction from the prophetic tradition. This produced two novel conceptions: the *sunnah* (tradition) and the *bidah* (innovation). The former means all those acts for which an overt or covert precedent from the life of the Prophet can be quoted, whereas all the rest come under the latter category, and hence are disapproved. This does not mean that every post-Prophetic thing is bidah. It is only when an extra-religious act is 'religion-ised' that the sunnah/bidah question arises. For example, an occasional visit to a place of religio-historical importance such as a saint's shrine may not be objected to seriously so long as people do not try to prove its necessity on religious grounds. But once this is done, the controversy begins. Similarly, the use of every means of transportation, whether medieval or modern, is permissible and no one can object to riding, say, a motorbike on the

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ground that it was not used by the Prophet. Nonetheless, those who care to follow the Prophet in minute details would keenly look for the opportunity of riding a camel or a horse, at least once in their life-time, because these were the animals which the Prophet used to ride. Since the life led by the Prophet, however, was considered to be an ideal life for those who wanted to attain God, adherence to the sunnah of the Prophet became an essential means to the realization of this goal. This pushed the Islamic community into the sphere of law.

Law is a basic concomitant of Islamic society. It has been shown earlier that without divine guidance man cannot find the right path. *Hidayat,* or guidance, therefore, becomes the most important word in Islamic vocabulary. A Muslim always is to look for guidance. Considered in this sense, the law of Islam is but an effort to make divine guidance as explicit and detailed as possible. In its broadest sense, the law in Islam is called the *shariah,* a word meaning pathway or roadway, the course which God wishes man to traverse. Thus the shariah becomes the eternal divine will for man, and Islam becomes a commitment to follow the shariah, because in no other way can man please God or escape His wrath.

The first and most important thing about the shariah, it is said, is the fact that it is a divine law. In the history of mankind, many different sanctions for legality have emerged, some having derived the authority of law from the old traditions, some from the decrees of rulers, still others from the consent of the people, etc. Islamic law accepts none of these but claims its origin and authority from the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet. According to Islamic understanding, man, a mere creature, with his unaided faculties, is incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong or of determining how he should live. God has decreed a way of life for him, and this decree is the sole and determinative norm. Divine, in this context, however, does not mean that every single point of law in Islam has necessarily been revealed by God or handed over to us by the Prophet. It only suggests that the bases of the shariah are the Quran and the sunnah (traditions) of the Prophet. These two sources were later elaborated, expanded and worked upon by the Companions and the early Muslim jurists, whose main job was to provide as detailed a guidance as possible to the community. It is thus clear that the Islamic law is divine only in the sense that it derives its authority and strength from God and the Prophet, but otherwise it is human, so far as its mechanism is concerned.

Law in Islam or the shariah, let us remember, regulates a number of things which in modern understanding may fall outside the scope of religion. A cursory glance at any major work on Islamic law will convince us that there is hardly any aspect of life for which no direct or indirect guidance is found in the shariah. For example, *Hidayah* of Al-Marghinani, an *opus magnum* of Islamic legal literature in Arabic has in it more than fifty chapters on various aspects of human life. The first few deal with physical purification and cleanliness, rules and regulations for basic religious duties like prayer,

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fasting, alms-giving, pilgrimage, etc. Then come questions of marriage, divorce, slaves, offences and punishments, war and peace, state taxes, the public treasury, apostasy, rebellion, business partnership, trust, commercial transactions, administration of justice, evidence, deposits, gifts, wages, misappropriation, pre-emption, assessment of rents and dues from agricultural lands and orchards, mortgage, capital crimes and compensation to victims of such crimes and other losses, sanctuary and asylum, will, and so on and so forth.

The subject-matter of Islamic law can be divided into (1) obligations owing to God *(ibadat)* and (2) obligations owing to other fellow-beings *(muamalat)*. Among the obligations to God, proper belief in the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad, as stated, is one of the foremost. With proper belief, there are four basic duties to God which are known as pillars *(arkan)* of Islam. They are *Salat, Sawm, Zakat* and *Hajj*.

Salat, the prayer or *namaz* as it is called in our sub-continent, is considered the most important of all obligations to God. It is, in the words of the Prophet, the point of distinction between belief and disbelief. It is offered five times a day — at dawn, midday, afternoon, immediately after sunset and in the early part of the night, preferably in assembly in a mosque, otherwise individually at home. The midday prayer on Fridays is offered only in congregation in important mosques of the town. On two rejoicing *Id* days an additional congregational prayer is offered in the early part of the day. The prayer is held only in important mosque(s) of the town.

Sawm, or Roza in Indo-Pak parlance, is the whole-day fasting for the entire month of *Ramadan*, the tenth month of the Islamic calendar. And since the Islamic calendar is lunar, the month of Ramadan moves along the season. Fasting is abstaining during daytime from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual pleasure. Every adult Muslim, man and woman, is expected to perform this duty. In case he is not physically fit to fast or is travelling, the fasting can be deferred till the time he is able to fulfil the obligation. People who are very old or in poor health with no hope of recovery are, however, exempted from fasting in exchange for feeding some needy person for the whole month, if they can afford it. If that also is beyond their means, then they should know that God is most forgiving and most merciful.

Fasting is, in a way, a family rejoicing. At the close of the day people according to their economic means prepare different types of dishes which are partaken of by the whole family usually after sending a portion of it to neighbours and poor families.

Zakat, besides the voluntary charity for which there is no limit, is an obligatory charity at the rate of two-and-a-half per cent of yearly savings if that exceeds the value of 7½ tolas of gold or 52 tolas of silver. One is not to wait for an official collector to come and receive the amount: one must

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voluntarily pay it if one desires to please God. The rates differ in the case of agricultural and commercial produce.

Hajj is a ritualistic pilgrimage to Mecca for performing certain rituals. Every adult Muslim is obligated to discharge this duty on a prescribed day in the last month of the Islamic calendar at least once in his life-time, if he has the necessary means for completing the journey. Pilgrims clad in white unstitched loin cloth (women are exempted from it) circumambulate the *Kaabah*, the cubic 'House of God', perform congregational prayer at Mina, an outskirt of Mecca, sacrifice eatable animals and return after having their head shaved (women are exempted from this also).

After completing the prescribed rituals in and around Mecca, the pilgrims move towards Medina for paying their respects and homage to the mosque and the tomb of the Prophet built in one of the corners of the mosque. The Hajj congregation is also an occasion for the Muslims of the world to meet and know one another.

So far as the Muslims' obligations to their fellow beings (muamalat) are concerned, they are no less important in the eyes of God than the ibadat. Man's action is, in fact, divided into duty towards God and duty towards His creation. He who fails in his duties towards God may, if he repents, expect His forgiveness, but those will never be forgiven who commit sin against their fellow beings unless forgiven by the person concerned.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ISLAM

Not that the Arabs did not know about the existence of Allah, the Arabic equivalent of God, they only considered Him a powerless creator. The Quran says: 'If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will say, Allah.' (31:25). That was all which Allah, in their eyes, was supposed to have done. Islam added another dimension to the belief in Allah. He was going to resurrect one day every created being and make him accountable for all his deeds. Forthwith people were told that every single act of theirs was recorded in the divine register and they would certainly be judged accordingly. They could not believe in such a thing, and said:

> **When we are bones and fragments, shall we, forsooth, be raised up as a new creation? Say, be ye stones or iron; or some created thing that is yet greater in your thoughts. Then they will say:**
> **Who shall bring us back (to life)? Say: He who created you at the first.**
> **Then they will shake their heads at thee, and say: When will it be?**
> **Say it will perhaps be soon. A day when He will call you and ye will answer with His praise, and ye will think that ye have tarried but a little while.**
>
> **(Q. 17:49-52)**

Islam makes it clear that life in this world is in fact a period of preparation for the eternal life which will follow soon. Then people will receive reward or punishment according to their actions in this world. This does not mean that Islam encourages the idea of individual piety only

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through prayers and worship. Man has social responsibility also, and cannot expect salvation without discharging his duties towards others. Prayers only, as the Quran says, will not help him on the Day of Reckoning:

Have you seen him who denies the judgement?
That is he who repulses the orphan (with harshness)
And encourages not the feeding of the needy,
Ah, woe unto worshippers,
Who are heedless of their prayers;
Who want but to be seen (at worship),
Yet refuse small kindness. **(Q.107:1-7)**

The central point around which the call of the Prophet revolved was the concept of *Tawhid,* or the uncompromising monotheism with emphasis on the transcendence of God. The other teachings of Islam which brought about a revolutionary change in the socio-religious conditions of Mecca and the whole of Arabia in the latter part of the Prophet's life were a corollary to this central theme of the unity of God and as though emanating from it. The idea of one Almighty God, creator and sustainer of the whole universe, implied the idea of one humanity as a family whose members were equal in the service of God. Thus, a strong sense of the brotherhood of all men and their equal status in the eyes of God can be said to be another basic teaching of Islam which was imparted right from its inception. The idea of the brotherhood entailed that they were all responsible for each other's welfare and no individual or group of people could thrive at the expense of others. Caring for others is, in fact, helping one's own self. The Prophet is reported to have told his companions that those who do not help others in the time of their distress are like voyagers in a double-decker ship in which water is stored on the upper deck, and the people on the lower deck are to climb up every time they need water. This annoys the upper deck people, and they close the connecting door. In their desperation, some people of the lower deck decide to drill a hole in the bottom of the ship in order to draw water from the river as and when they please. This is a grave and alarming situation. If the people of the upper deck do not let the unfortunates of the lower deck share their water, and also the people of the lower deck do not stop those who are bent upon drilling the hole, they all will indeed be gone.

The Meccans did not pay heed to such advice because that was not in their interest. Sharing meant giving for which they were not prepared. And there was no authority which could force them to do so. The Meccan economy was controlled by a kind of business oligarchy whose interest lay in maintaining the *status quo* and retaining the economic power in the hands of the few. Also there was nothing in their religious system which could induce them to share with others.

Not that the Arabs of the Prophet's time were averse to spending on others. In the Arabic classics, we find stories which portray them as men carelessly spending and gifting away extravagantly. But theirs was not a

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welfare society in which the 'have-nots' are taken care of by the 'haves'. The Quran suggested to them to draw a line between welfare and wasteful expenditure. First, it said that one must give away what one has in surplus (Q.2:219). Then it categorised the people who should be given preference in monetary help. It said: 'Show kindness unto parents, and unto near kinred, and orphans, and the needy, and unto the neighbour who is of kin (unto you), and the neighbour who is not of kin and the fellow-traveller and the wayfarer, and the slaves whom your right hands possess (Q. 4:36). It then added:

> **Allah does not love those who are proud and boastful (and those) who hoard their wealth and enjoin avarice on others, and hide that which Allah has bestowed upon them of His bounty . . . and also those who spend their wealth in order to be seen of men, and believe not in Allah nor the Last Day. (Q. 4:37)**

The Prophet so emphatically urged his Companions to look after the needs of their neighbours and spend for them that, according to a report, they thought that a revelation might one day come down fixing a share for the neighbours in the scheme of inheritance. According to a saying of the Prophet, pious are those who instead of stewing the meat cook it with a lot of gravy. Thus, if the meat is not sufficient, they can at least share the gravy with their neighbours. The night prayers of those who sleep well-fed without ascertaining if their neighbours have had their supper would not be worth the carpet on which they had prayed, thus had been said. Further,

> **You will not attain piety until you spend of that which you love. And whatsoever you spend, Allah is aware thereof. (Q.3:92)**

The emphasis on giving away and sharing one's own wealth with others does not mean that Islam wanted to create or retain a class of beggars living on charity. Far from it. Neither did the Prophet approve of it, nor did his Companions ever practise it. When the Prophet and the Companions migrated to Medina empty-handed, a fraternity between the migrant and the helper Companions was established. Each helper Companion was to accept a migrant as his *frater*. Some of the helpers took this fraternity so seriously that they took their migrant brothers to their homes and wanted them to accept half of their property. The migrants thanked them profusely but refused to accept anything. The only help which they sought from them was to direct them to the market-place, where they could earn their own bread. Since the act of giving, and not receiving, elevates a man's position in the eyes of God and entitles him for the divine reward on the Day of Judgement, it automatically discourages begging. Virtuous are those who do not stretch their hand before others even in a time of distress. It is the duty of the haves to locate them and help them. As the Quran says:

> **Charity is for the poor who, in God's cause, are restricted (from travel) and cannot travel in the land, seeking trade or work. The unthinking man**

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accounts them wealthy because of their restraint. You shall know them by their mark. They do not beg of men with importunity. And whatsoever good thing you spend, lo Allah knows it.

Those who spend their wealth (in charity) by night and day, by stealth and openly, verily their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them, neither shall they grieve. (Q.2:273-4)

The poor are indeed the children of God, and must be looked after, but poverty itself is not a thing which people should aspire for. They have been rather warned against it. Abstinence and self-imposed poverty, in fact, are no virtues in Islam. It must be remembered here that in this world one is not necessarily rewarded for one's act of giving. It is the next world where he will indeed be fully compensated. This naturally eliminates the possibility of people wishing to live on charity and not working for being able to give, because then they shall have nothing to their credit on the Day of Judgement.

If giving liberates the poor from his dire needs, it certainly emancipates the rich from selfishness and indulgence. It makes him see his duties towards society in which he lives. This does not mean, as some people tend to believe, that Islam was basically an economic movement launched by the Prophet to help the poor of Mecca initially, and then of the world at large. Far from it, Islam came to liberate both: one from the pangs of poverty and the other from the evils which follow an abundance of money. It liberated the haves from their materialistic attitude which had isolated them from the rest of the people. Without accepting what Islam gives, the rich are, no doubt, sheltered and clothed and fed and cared for, and yet they are poorer in human qualities than the poorest of men. A man needs more than food and clothes and money to make him human. He needs love and kindness and affection, things which cannot be bought in the market. It is Islam which tells us how to obtain them. By providing a transcendental dimension to life, it cut at the root of materialism: by emphasizing giving and sharing, it negated individualism.

It is not by giving only to Muslims will one be rewarded on the Day of Judgement. The act of giving as such, irrespective of the creed of the receiver, is an act of piety. When the Quran was being revealed and Muslims were asked to give in the name of God, some people hesitated to give monetary help to their non-Muslim kin, considering it a wasteful investment. On this, the Quran said:

You are not responsible for their guidance; Allah Himself shows guidance to anyone He pleases. And whatever wealth you spend in charity, it is for your own good. As you spend of your wealth to win Allah's pleasure, you will be given full reward for whatever you spend and you will not be deprived in the least of your rightful dues. (Q.2:272)

To create a healthy social order, Islam laid great stress on protecting the honour of every individual. It forbade people from accepting scandalous

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news without fully ascertaining the fact (Q.49:6). A man was obliged to give evidence to help the others if he knew the fact (Q.2:283), but false evidence before a court of law was made a cognizable offence (Q.24:4). And thus justice to every individual was ensured.

A Muslim from Birth to Death

Theoretically, life in a Muslim house is very simple and colourless, but theory, however, yields quite often to the pressure of actualities. Many colourful events, therefore, varying according to local customs, can be witnessed in a Muslim house. They are mostly non-religious except a few which have some religious significance and yet are observed with a certain amount of gay abandon and gaiety.

In principle, there is no formal initiation for a Muslim child because, according to the Prophet's saying every child comes into this world as a Muslim, it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian. However, in order to attune the child to the divine call immediately after his arrival into this world, the words of *azan* ('the call to prayer') are whispered into both his ears:

God is the greatest, God is the greatest, God is the greatest, God is the greatest
I testify that none except God is Allah, I testify that none except God is Allah
I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God,
I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God
Hurry up to prayer, Hurry up to prayer
Hurry up to success, Hurry up to success
God is the greatest, God is the greatest
None except Allah is God.

On or soon after the seventh day, the child is given his name in a ceremonial gathering, called *Aqiqah*, in which his/her head is shaved, and silver equal to the weight of the removed hair is given in charity. Then a goat or a sheep, customarily two for a boy, is sacrificed whose two-thirds meat is distributed among the poor and friends and relatives.

At the age of four, the ceremony of *Bismillah* ('I begin with the name of God') is arranged in which the child is adorned with a colourful glittering dress, and given the first lesson in the reading of the Quran. The child repeats with the teacher the few initial lines of chapter 96 of the Quran, 'Recite in the name of thy Lord . . .' And thus begins his schooling.

Contracting a marriage is very simple but the occasion is certainly a day of feasting and joy. Once the couple agrees, in the presence of witnesses, to live as husband and wife, the marriage is solemnized for which neither a priest nor a magistrate is needed. Customarily, however, various colourful ceremonies precede and follow the event.

The end is death. The dead body is first given a bath and shrouded in white. After offering a special congregational prayer, the body is put to

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rest in the grave. People reciting the Quranic verse (20:25), 'From this (earth) did we create you, and into it shall we return you, and from it we bring you out once again,' fill the grave with earth and again after praying for the departed soul, they return to the bereaved family. On the third day they assemble again for the Fatihah in which the Quran is recited and food is given to the poor for invoking God's mercy for the dead. This marks the end of the mourning period, except for the widow who remains in mourning for four months and ten days or, if she is expecting, till the baby is born.

ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

Law is hardly followed with love, sincerity and devotion, for it creates a certain degree of fear. This happened in the case of Islamic law also. It certainly developed well as a science — some major schools of Islamic jurisprudence such as Hanafi, Shafei, Maliki, Hanbali and Jafari were established in the course of time but, like any other legal system, it also remained quite remote from the hearts of the people. And thus the rigidity and formalism of the Islamic legalists found their reaction in the development of mystic thought. The Muslim mystics did not agree with the jurists' assumption that 'physical cleanliness' would ultimately result in 'spiritual cleanliness'. To the mystics, the real purpose of Islam was to bring man nearer to God, and this, they stressed, could not be achieved without first purifying the soul. In fact, both these legalistic and mystical attitudes had in view one and the same goal of attaining God, but they differed with each other in their approach. Legalism laid stress on the correctness of the outward actions of man, whereas mysticism was more concerned with the purity of heart. The following couplet beautifully expresses the mystic attitude towards the attainment of life's objective:

You cannot see God in books like *Kanz* **or** *Hidayah,*
Look into the mirror of your heart,
For there is no better book than this.

Mysticism, in the Islamic context, is called *tasawwuf;* a mystic is a *sufi.* The etymology of the word tasawwuf is not yet certain. However, it is usually traced to the rough woollen robes (*suf* in Arabic) that were the identifying badges of the early mystics. There is no doubt that the first stage of the development of Islamic mysticism was marked by ascetic practices. Soon enough, however, emerged an active quest for experiencing the intimate relationship with God that is the climax of real mysticism. Eventually, an elaborate system of mystical thought and practices came into existence.

Love of God and love of man are the two pillars on which stands the edifice of Islamic mysticism. To the sufis, faith in God is not complete without love for His creatures. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, a famous sufi of medieval India, remarks that devotion to God is of two kinds: *lazimi* (intransitive) and *mutaaddi* (transitive). The benefits accruing from the former are confined to the devotee alone. They can be achieved through

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prayers, fastings, recitation of the Quran and so on. Transitive devotion, however, brings advantages and comforts not only to the devotee but to others too. It is performed by helping people, spending money on the poor, and by all other means through which a man strives to help his fellows. The rewards of transitive devotion, says Nizamuddin Auliya, are endless. Since the stress in Islamic mysticism was on 'salvation through service', it very soon assumed the form of a movement for the spiritual culture of Islamic society. Mysticism has attracted more people to it than any other movement in Islam. Since the mystics, contrary to the men of law, believed in patience, they, instead of passing judgement against the 'sick soul', embraced it and waited for cure. This, however much against their wishes, created a kind of laxity among many of their followers. For many such people, devotion to mystic life means invoking the name of a saint in difficulties and asking for charms and amulets for warding off evil spirits.

Thus it is correct to say that within the ranks of the mystics, there were wide gradations, ranging from men of great intellectual attainments and character to whom mysticism offered a rich spiritual experience, strengthening their grasp on the truths of their religion, down to those who found in mysticism an emotional and moral satisfaction and cared little whether their practices and postulates were in harmony with Islamic doctrine or not.

Sufism has in the past been dominating Muslim religious life. Today it is on the wane. The concern nevertheless is alive in the hearts of thousands of those Muslims to whom religion is suffused not so much with sufi teachings and ideas, as with their stories, their tombs, their miracles.

Unity in Diversity

The spread of Islam beyond the confines of Arabia and the advancement of theological and philosophical knowledge gave rise to serious differences in the interpretation of the divine revelation and the prophetic teachings. Thus from a relatively early period, Islam did not escape sectarian divisions. There are many, but two are noteworthy, the Sunnites (*sunni*) and the Shiites (*shiah*). They differ from each other basically on two points: succession to the Prophet Muhammad and the religious authority in Islam after him. The Sunnis follow the line of succession from among the Companions of the Prophet, beginning with Abu Bakr. Also the basis of authority in Islam after the Prophet, according to the Sunnis, is the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet, as understood and confirmed by the consensus of the community's learned people, the ulema. The Shiahs hold that the succession was restricted to the family of the Prophet through his daughter, Fatimah. They, therefore, place Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet and the fourth Caliph of Islam, in the historical sequence, as his first rightful heir. Religious authority for them finds its basis, as against the Sunnis, in the person of an inspired *Imam* (leader), always a member of the Prophet's family, who is infallible in all doctrinal and practical declarations. Recognition of the Imam and submission only to his interpretation of the

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Quran and the tradition of the Prophet are incumbent on all Muslims, the Shiahs believe. On the exact number of Imams, the Shiahs are not unanimous. Some believe that there have come twelve, some say seven, Imams since the death of the Prophet. (Despite the fact that the Imams have ceased to come, their authority still prevails and is expressed by one of the most learned men of the world Shiah community who is acting on behalf of the invisible living Imam who will make his appearance on the eve of the Last Day.)

According to the Sunnis, as we have seen, the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet was not bound to accept an individual or a body as the final religious authority. Even the caliphs essentially remained merely the political heads of the community.

'Caliph' is the anglicized version of the Arabic word *Khalifah* meaning successor. This title was first given to Abu Bakr, the Companion of the Prophet, who after the death of his master was chosen by the fellow Companions to lead the Muslim community. Later, all those who were called to this highest political and administrative office of state were usually called *khalifah.* The early Muslims had made little or no distinction between the 'religious' and the 'temporal'. Since there was no clear-cut demarcation between these two concepts, the caliph who was essentially a political head was often mistaken for an authority also in religious matters. But, as a matter of fact, he was only the political head of the community and not the spiritual heir of the Prophet. It was clearly understood and agreed upon that only the Quran and the prophetic traditions were more than enough to guide the community. Nonetheless, 'legalism' and 'literalism' produced a class of religiously learned people, the ulema, who in the course of time unofficially became the 'official' spokesmen of Islam.

The two groups of Islamic community, the ulema and the sufis, could not, on many matters, see most of the time eye to eye with each other. The ulema criticized the mystical approach of attaining God as something alien to the prophetic tradition. The mystics, in their turn, condemned the ulema as being merely the followers of the 'letter'. Much of their bickering, however, was the outcome of the rigid literalism of one group and the apparent laxity of the other with regard to religious practices. This internal conflict, coupled with an external threat in the form of modern and scientific ideas, gave rise to many reform movements in the long history of Islam.

To an outsider, these internal conflicts of the Muslim community may appear as a sign of disintegration. However, there is a pervasive under-current of unity which asserts itself at critical junctures and draws the members of diverse groups into a single community. This has so far saved the community from internal erosion as well as external pressure.

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Today the Muslim world faces a peculiar problem. In the past, usually the ulema, in their collective or individual capacity, stood up to check the community from going astray. All their efforts were directed towards what may be called revivalism. Now the situation is different. The ulema, in most cases, have been replaced by the state. In almost every Muslim country, it is the state which is trying to bring about reforms by advocating the modernization of Islamic law to suit the changed circumstances of the present era. The ulema, on the other hand, contend that Islamic law, meaning thereby the shariah, is immutable, hence modernization is out of the question. This conflict between the ulema and the state is a characteristic of modern Islam and, if continued, may vitally affect the future course of its history.

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The Scriptures

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.
The parable of His light is as if there were a niche
And within it a lamp:
The Lamp enclosed in glass:
The glass as it were a brilliant star;
Lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the East nor of the West,
Whose oil is well-nigh luminous,
Though fire scarce touched it.
Light upon light!
God doth guide
Whom He will
To His Light:
God doth set forth parables for men:
And God doth know all things.

Q.24.35

Say: O my slaves who have been prodigal to their own hurt!
Despair not of the Mercy of Allah, Who forgiveth all sins.
Lo! He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.
Turn unto Him repentant, and surrender unto
Him, before there come unto you the doom,
when ye cannot be helped.

Q. 39. 53, 54

Say: Who is Lord of the heavens and the earth?
Say: Allah.
Say: Take ye then (others) beside Him for protectors,
Which, even for themselves, have neither benefit nor hurt?
Say: Is the blind man equal to the seer, or is
darkness equal to light?

Q.13:16

O mankind! Lo! We have created you male
and female, and have made you nations
and tribes that ye may know one another.
Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah,
is the best in conduct. Lo!
Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.

Q.49.13

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O my dear son! Lo! though it be but the weight
of a grain of mustard-seed, and though it be
in a rock, or in the heavens, or in the earth,
Allah will bring it forth. Lo! Allah is subtle, aware.

O my dear son! Establish worship and enjoin
kindness and forbid iniquity, and
persevere whatever may befall thee. Lo! that is of
the steadfast heart of things.

Turn not thy cheek in scorn toward folk,
nor walk with pertness in the land.
Lo! Allah loveth not each braggart boaster.
Be modest in thy bearing and subdue
thy voice. Lo! the harshest of all voices
is the voice of the ass.

Q. 31.16-19

Say: He is Allah, the One!
Allah, the eternally Besought of all!
He begetteth not nor was begotten.
And there is none comparable unto Him.

Q.112:1-4

Festivals

Muharram: The first month of the Muslim calendar (also called Hijra), of which the first 10 days are observed mourning the martyrdom of Imam Husain, the grandson of the Prophet, which occurred on the 10th day of Muharram of 61 Hijra year, corresponding to 680 AD. During these days, the events leading to the martyrdom are recited in dramatised verses, and tableaux symbolising the events as well as the tomb, *taziah*, of the martyr are carried in procession. Muslims, mostly the Shiahs, march in procession wailing and beating their breasts and sometimes engaging in self-inflicted flagellations and tortures.

Id Milad-un-Nabi (the Prophet's birthday): Observed on the 12th day of the third month of the Muslim calendar. Congregations in remembrance of the Prophet are held in homes and at public places and usually end with the distribution of sweets. In some places the day is observed as a public holiday, and processions and rallies are taken out with much fanfare.

Shab-e-barat (the night of rejoicing or deliverance): Observed on the eve of the 15th day of the eighth month. On this night, Muslims believe that God records in advance for the whole year what is in divine store for them. Muslims stay awake the whole night, praying and visiting the graves of relatives and observe a fast the following day. But most of them, however, take it as the night of merry-making, cooking and exchanging sweets, especially *halwa*, and illuminating their homes and mosques.

Id-ul-Fitr (the feast of the breaking of the fast): Observed on the first day of the tenth month which follows Ramadan, the month of fasting. *Id* literally means rejoicing, hence no fasting is allowed on this day. Muslims put on new clothes, give a fixed amount in charity and offer prayers in congregation. After the prayers, they visit friends and relatives and partake of sweet dishes, particularly vermicelli, *sewain*, especially prepared for the occasion.

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Id-ul-Adha (the feast of the sacrifice): Also known as *Baqr-Id* or *Id-e-Qurban,* it is observed on the tenth day of the twelfth month of the year. The feast commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son for God. Like *Id-ul-Fitr,* it is also a day of prayer and rejoicing. Muslims put on new clothes and go for prayer, after which, those who can afford it sacrifice animals in the name of God. The meat is divided equally among themselves, their friends and the poor. Such sacrificial killing is also permitted on the following two days.

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בַּמֶּה אֲקַדֵּם יְהוָה אִכַּף לֵאלֹהֵי מָרוֹם הַאֲקַדְּמֶנּוּ
בְעוֹלוֹת בַּעֲגָלִים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה: הֲיִרְצֶה יְהוָה בְּאַלְפֵי
אֵילִים בְּרִבְבוֹת נַחֲלֵי שָׁמֶן הַאֶתֵּן בְּכוֹרִי פִּשְׁעִי פְּרִי
בִטְנִי חַטַּאת נַפְשִׁי: הִגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מַה־טּוֹב וּמָה
יְהוָה דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמְּךָ כִּי אִם־עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד
וְהַצְנֵעַ לֶכֶת עִם־אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before the high God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a-year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul?
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;
and what doth the Lord require of thee,
but to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God?
Micah 6, 6-8

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Judaism

The Jewish religion evolved over many centuries before the Common Era (referred to here as B.C.E., corresponding to the Christian B.C.) through the people known as the Israelites and in order to get a proper understanding of this ancient living faith it is necessary to know something about Jewish history.

HISTORY

Judaism is one of the world's oldest organised religions, and its origin goes back to Abraham (the father of the people) who was born in Ur of the Chaldees (Babylonia—modern Iraq) approximately 4000 years ago. His father was a maker of idols and Abraham spent the earlier part of his life in that moon-worshipping city. It was in response to a strong and persistent inner voice, that he decided to leave Babylonia and to go to a land that the Lord God was going to show him. In his old age, Abraham and his wife Sarah had a son, Isaac, as promised to them by God.

Abraham conceived the idea of Monotheism, the oneness of an invisible God (and the brotherhood of man), demanding as the Creator of heaven and earth, absolute obedience to His will and divine dictates for the good of mankind. It is recorded in the very first chapter of the Bible, the first five books of which are known in Judaism as the *Torah* (the way of life—the law) that man was created by God out of the dust of the earth; and he became a living soul only when God breathed His spirit into that form, implying in other words that it is the divine breath that activates humanity.

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**And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;
and man became a living soul.**

Genesis 2.7

Abraham's implicit faith in the Creator was put to stern test when he was commanded to take his son Isaac up a mountain and there offer him as a sacrifice to the Lord. Just as Abraham was about to fulfil this injunction, the Lord God intervened through an angel and prevented the sacrifice—thereby indicating for all time that human sacrifice was not acceptable to Him, in contrast to the practice then prevailing among the heathens.

Abraham travelled with his flocks and entourage to Egypt and Canaan (Palestine of modern times) which was the land promised by God to him and his descendants through Isaac. In Canaan Isaac married Rebekah, and they had two sons, one of them being Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel as the result of a mysterious encounter he had with God one night. The modern interpretation of the word Israel is 'May God strive, contend or rule.' Since that time the followers of Abraham and his newfound faith were called Israelites or the children of Israel.

Jacob had two wives and 12 sons, one of whom was Joseph. It is related in the Bible how this boy, especially loved by his father, incurred the envy and wrath of his brothers who one day tried to get rid of him by throwing him into a pit from where he was rescued by one of the brothers and sold into slavery to passing merchants from Egypt.

By virtue of his wisdom and capacity to interpret dreams, Joseph rose to a position of eminence in the court of the king (the Pharaoh) of Egypt. He foretold seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine in Egypt, and in recognition of his incomparable ability the Pharaoh made Joseph next in command only to himself to oversee the operations to conserve grain during the years of plenty and to distribute it equitably during the years of famine. It was during this period that he was reunited with his father and brothers who had come to Egypt to collect corn.

Moses (14-13th century B.C.E.) But times changed and after many centuries the people of Israel fell into disfavour with the new Pharaohs who made them slaves and treated them with extreme cruelty. It was in such circumstances that there arose a saviour in the person of Moses who had escaped death by drowning at his birth (an edict that had been issued by the Pharaoh to get rid of all male children born to Hebrew (Jewish) women. Moses had been saved by a stratagem devised by his mother who placed him in the Nile in a small basket covered at such a time and in such a place that the king's daughter could see him when she came with her entourage to bathe. The princess having no son of her own immediately adopted the child and in this way Moses was saved and brought up as a member of the royal household. But when he grew to adulthood and saw the affliction and suffering of his people, he was inspired by God to rise in revolt and demand

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that the Pharaoh let all the Hebrews go away in peace to the land that had been promised to them. Pharaoh refused many times and on each occasion Moses, through God's intercession, inflicted on the king and his people a series of punishments and plagues, each one being worse than the one before. After each plague the king relented but his heart became more hardened when the actual time of departure came and it was only when the tenth and last plague was inflicted—the killing by the angel of Death of the first-born in every household, except of those whose doorposts were marked with the fingerprints of the Hebrews who had been enjoined to do so by dipping their hands in the blood of the sacrificial lambs offered to God the previous evening, that the Pharaoh allowed them to leave the land.

A vast concourse of Hebrews with all their belongings left Egypt, before the king could change his mind, in a great hurry, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron his brother; the hurry was so great that they had to make bread for their meal before departure as soon as the flour had been mixed with water, without waiting for the leaven to form to raise the dough.

And so the children of Israel made their exodus, being saved ultimately from destruction by the Pharaoh's army by a miracle whereby the waters of the Red Sea parted and remained so till the Hebrews crossed over to the other side but closed in upon the pursuing army.

Subsequently they had to wander in the wilderness for forty years on their way to the promised land, during which period they lived in temporary booths and suffered many tribulations, but were constantly inspired under the leadership of Moses to have faith and hope in their ultimate redemption. It was during this wandering that Moses was summoned to Mount Sinai where he was given the *Ten Commandments* inscribed on two stone tablets by God Himself. Moses and his followers were chosen to accept, practise and propagate this first great charter of human rights—the code of conduct and freedom that forms the basis of ethical and civilised behaviour. Its cardinal principle is to proclaim the unity of God and the sanctification of life through universal love and social justice.

After forty years of wandering, the children of Israel at last reached Canaan where the 12 tribes (corresponding to the 12 sons of Jacob) settled and were governed by a series of prophets till the time of the prophet Samuel (about 1100 B.C.E.) when they wanted a king; and King Saul was chosen as the first king.

David After Saul came David, a charismatic and brilliant leader,who first distinguished himself when as a boy he slew the giant Goliath of the Philistines on being challenged to single combat and later became the harpist to King Saul. David made Jerusalem the national capital. He was the composer of most of the famous psalms—a set of 150 hymns which constitute the foundation of Jewish prayers, the most well known and widely sung of which is the twenty-third. David was succeeded by his son Solomon whose wisdom was proverbial and who built the first temple in Jerusalem in

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approximately 950 B.C.E. After his death, the kingdom split in two—the 10 northern tribes became the kingdom of Israel and the two southern tribes the kingdom of Judah (from which comes the term Yehuda or Jew).

The northern kingdom—Israel—was invaded and destroyed by the Assyrians in approximately 721 B.C.E.; the 10 tribes were dispersed and since no one knows where exactly they went or what happened to them, they have come to be known as the Lost Tribes of Israel. There is, however, some speculation that some of them came to India and one section now settled in a remote area of Kashmir refers to itself as the Bene-Israel, although there is so far no historic evidence in support of this theory. In 586 B.C.E. the southern kingdom of Judah was invaded by the Babylonians and while most of the Jews were taken away to Babylonia in captivity, some remained in Jerusalem. The temple was destroyed, but was rebuilt in 576 B.C.E., when the Persian King Cyrus the Great conquered Palestine and in a noble edict permitted the Jews to return to the holy land and rebuild the temple.

It is related that in the second century B.C.E. Jerusalem was for a time conquered by Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), the Syrian emperor, who laid the temple waste and desecrated it. When the Macabees, so called because they were the followers of the rebel Jewish leader Judas Maccabeus (Judas the hammer), revolted, they recaptured Jerusalem and the temple in 164 B.C.E. The first thing they did was to cleanse and rededicate the temple. According to tradition they found only one cruse of the sacred oil used to light the temple's eternal lamp and though this was sufficient only for one day it miraculously lasted for eight. The event is commemorated every year in the festival of Hannukah (dedication). Another historical event, as related in the Book of Esthe, describes how the Jews of the Persian Empire (which extended from Ethiopia to India) were providentially delivered from massacre at the hands of Haman the villainous and crafty viceroy of the Persian King Ahashverosh (486-465 B.C.E.). The deliverance and triumph of good over evil are celebrated every year during the feast of Purim so called because the date for the massacre planned had been set by the throwing of dice (purim).

The Macabees set up a new Jewish state in 142 B.C.E. which lasted only until 63 B.C.E. when the Romans under Pompey conquered Palestine. The Jews revolted in 66 A.D. and the Romans destroyed the temple in the year 70 A.D., when the main body of Jews was dispersed all over the world and remained politically in exile till their return in 1948 to the newly formed state of Israel after nearly 2000 years, although some Jews continued to live in Palestine throughout the ages.

THE DOCTRINES

Unity of God The basic and overriding tenet in Judaism is the belief in the unity and oneness of the Universal Creator. The most important prayer in Judaism is the *Shema* (which is the Hebrew for hear)— 'Hear O Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Blessed be His name whose glorious Kingdom is for ever and ever.'

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The concept of the God of all creation and mankind carried with it the corollary of the brotherhood of man, bound together by mutual love. This was a revolutionary thought at a time when relations between human beings were dictated almost solely by violence, fear, envy and rivalries. There are innumerable examples of Jews in history who have died as martyrs, rather than give up their faith. When after the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D., the Jews were scattered throughout the world and lost contact with the mainstream of their faith but retained their religion mainly by the daily recitation of the divine formula contained in their prayer.

Universal Love

There are 613 precepts in the Torah (first five books in the Bible) to regulate the daily life of every Jew and this number is symbolised in the threads of the prayer shawl (*Tsisith*) that every male adult Jew is enjoined to wear at prayers, as a reminder of the obligations imposed upon him. When Rabbi (the word means a teacher or guide similar to a guru or shastri in India) Hillel was once asked by an agnostic to propound the Torah to him while he stood on one foot, the Rabbi replied, 'What is hurtful to yourself do not to your fellow-man. That is the whole of the Torah and the remainder is but commentary.' In other words, love and social justice are the mainsprings of ethical behaviour and so important is it that in Judaism the cardinal daily prayer known as the *Shema* is immediately followed by these words 'and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might and these words which I command thee this day shall be upon thy heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house and when thou walkest by the way and when thou liest down and when thou risest up, and thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes and thou shalt write them upon the doorposts and upon thy gates.'

Judaism lays great emphasis on the importance of a good moral life at every living moment and does not advocate asceticism, celibacy and self-imposed suffering, since salvation is obtainable only through good deeds. The observance of certain rituals and formalities, while significant if they are properly understood, cannot be a substitute for right living and it is only if such an attitude is adopted that religion ceases to be mere hypocrisy. In the Bible there is a constant dialogue between God and man who is enjoined to be holy because 'I the Lord thy God am holy.' Hence there is a daily discipline of prayers to be said, apart from the prayers on feasts and special occasions. In the morning prayers Jews are reminded to be thankful to the Creator for the great and wonderful gift of life, and if one follows this thought to its logical conclusion, one can achieve a spirit of peace and contentment by realising and counting the blessings from day to day rather than by bemoaning what one does not possess.

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Ten Commandments The importance of the Ten Commandments lies in the moral and ethical purpose with which it invests man's existence.

And God spoke all these words, saying:

I am the LORD thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.
Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain;
Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the LORD thy God, in it thou shalt not do any manner of work, thou, for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.
Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.
Thou shalt not murder.
Thou shalt not commit adultery.
Thou shalt not steal.
Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's.

Exodus 20 1-14

It must be noted here that when the Jews speak of their being a chosen people they mean chosen to receive and spread the divine commandments and not selected for special favours or privileges.

Another important commandment is the fifth which says honour thy father and thy mother' the importance of which cannot be overemphasised. Love and respect for parents are the cornerstones for a healthy and happy family life and Judaism realised this thousands of years ago by making it a religious precept. In homes where this is strictly adhered to there is no room for that much-publicised present-day idea of generation gap

The Messiah (MA-SHI-AH in Hebrew) The Jewish idea of a messiah (the anointed one, saviour of mankind) is rooted in the fifty-first verse of chapter 22 of the second book of Samuel which says:

A tower of salvation is He to His King;
And showeth mercy to His anointed,
To David and to his seed, for evermore.

During centuries of persecution the Jews clung to the idea of a Messiah who would be born amidst them and would fight the battles of God and Israel. The concept visualises the second coming of the Prophet Elijah as the harbinger of the Messiah who will save the world from war and suffering leading to universal brotherhood when

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. . . the Lord shall be King over all the earth;
In that day shall the Lord be One, and His name one.
Zech 14-9

The Jews look to a Messiah not as a divine or supernatural being, but a powerful human entity to usher in an age of universal peace.

SACRED WRITINGS

Tanak (Bible) The Torah is a part of the Jewish Bible known in Hebrew as Tanak (the word is derived from the first letters of the three portions into which it is divided):

Torah (law or guide)
Nay-Bee-Eem (prophets)
Kay-Tu-Veem (writings—psalms, proverbs, etc.)

The entire Torah is read over a period of one year in progressive sections (*Sidras*) on every sabbath, on festivals and on every Monday and Thursday in the synagogue morning services when a quorum (Minyan) of 10 men, which includes boys of 13 and above, is present. In most synagogues the prayers are recited in Hebrew and this has ensured the link between Jews of every generation with their ancient roots. It may also be mentioned at this stage that Judaism no longer has a system of a priestly caste; the rabbis are the qualified teachers and guides but any member of the congregation who has the necessary ability, knowledge and experience can conduct the religious services. The descendants of the ancient priests (Cohanim) do, however, perform a special role on certain occasions when they bless the congregation in a prescribed form, in commemoration of the ritual in the temple of ancient days.

Psalms The psalms are a set of 150 inspirational and devotional hymns that have a universal appeal and constitute the foundation of Jewish (and even Christian) services throughout the world, like the famous twenty-third psalm. They are a source of strength to those who are in trouble, of courage to those who are depressed and of faith to those in doubt.

Proverbs About the proverbs, special mention need be made here of the one that says 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'. Fear here is not to be interpreted as cringing cowardly behaviour but rather as reverence and respect for the Almighty. For a healthy and disciplined society it is necessary that the individuals composing it should know that they cannot indulge in perversity and lawlessness (in infringing the Ten Commandments) with impunity. The evil qualities and inclinations of mere mortals must be curbed and subdued by a real fear of wrongdoing, without which crimes both great and small would be uncontrollably rampant. The philosophy of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was never intended to incite revenge but rather to emphasise that there must be apt punishment and retribution for harm done to another. At a time in history when it was a life for just a tooth or an eye, it was indeed a leap forward in thinking to

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ordain that the punishment must never exceed the extent of the sin or error committed.

Talmud Immediately preceding and following the destruction of the temple, the masters of the law (rabbis) specialised in interpreting the ancient regulations and over the centuries developed the *Talmud* (learning —the fundamental code of Jewish civil and religious law, supplementary to the Bible and representing a cultural growth of more than 700 years). It comprises the Mishnah (oral law codified around 200 C.E.) and the *Gemara* (commentaries) recorded during the 3rd-6th centuries C.E.) which can truly be considered an encyclopaedia of Jewish rules, knowledge and folklore.

Thirteen Articles of the Creed The thirteen principles of the Jewish faith formulated by Rabbi Maimonides (1135-1204), chanted by many congregations at the end of most religious services, may be summarised as follows:

Magnified and praised be the living God;
He is One
He has neither bodily form nor substance
His existence has no beginning
He is the Lord of the Universe
He gave his gifts to His prophets
Moses was His special prophet
He gave us all the Law of Truth
God's Law is unchangeable
He knows our secret thoughts
He is kind to those who love Him but punishes evil
He will give us salvation in the end
He will revive the dead.

JUDAISM IN PRACTICE

Prayers Prayers play a very important role in Judaism. They constitute an individual communal approach to God through meditation, pleas, requests, confession,supplication or expression of praise and thanksgiving, whereby communication can be established between human beings and the Creator. After the destruction of the temple and the dispersion of the Jews, the temple rituals were replaced by devotional prayers in the synagogue in the spirit of the sublime teachings of the prophets. The rabbis in course of time formulated three daily religious services—evening, morning and afternoon—and each congregation was led by a professional or voluntary amateur cantor (termed *Hasan*) since a major portion of the services are sung or chanted. The early morning prayer includes a sublime utterance of thankfulness to God for the divine gift of life.

O my God, the soul which thou gavest me is pure; Thou didst create it, Thou didst form it. Thou didst breathe it into me. Thou preservedest it within me, and Thou wilt take it from me, but wilt restore unto me hereafter. So long as the soul is within me, I will

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THE TANAK

תורה נביאים כתובים

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם וְאַתָּה אֶת־בְּרִיתִי
תִשְׁמֹר אַתָּה וְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתָם: זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ
בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ הִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר: וּנְמַלְתֶּם
אֵת בְּשַׂר עָרְלַתְכֶם וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם: וּבֶן־
שְׁמֹנַת יָמִים יִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם יְלִיד בַּיִת וּמִקְנַת־
כֶּסֶף מִכֹּל בֶּן־נֵכָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזַּרְעֲךָ הוּא: הִמּוֹל יִמּוֹל יְלִיד
בֵּיתְךָ וּמִקְנַת כַּסְפֶּךָ וְהָיְתָה בְרִיתִי בִּבְשַׂרְכֶם לִבְרִית עוֹלָם:

And God said unto Abraham: 'And as for thee, thou shalt keep My covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generations. This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money or any foreigner, that is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. *Genesis 17.9-13.*

וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־
יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה
וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אַחַד הֶהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ: וַיַּשְׁכֵּם
אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־חֲמֹרוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אִתּוֹ
וְאֵת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיְבַקַּע עֲצֵי עֹלָה וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־
אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים: בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִשִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו
וַיַּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרָחֹק: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נְעָרָיו שְׁבוּ־לָכֶם
פֹּה עִם־הַחֲמוֹר וַאֲנִי וְהַנַּעַר נֵלְכָה עַד־כֹּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה
אֲלֵיכֶם: וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֲצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיָּשֶׂם עַל־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:
וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי בְנִי
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים וְאַיֵּה הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם
אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה־לּוֹ הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה בְּנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו: וַיָּבֹאוּ
אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּבֶן שָׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶת־
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת־הָעֵצִים וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ
עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לָעֵצִים: וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח
אֶת־הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת לִשְׁחֹט אֶת־בְּנוֹ: וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה
מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־
תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל־הַנַּעַר וְאַל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי
כִּי־יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי:
וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אַיִל אַחַר נֶאֱחַז בַּסְּבַךְ
בְּקַרְנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאַיִל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַּחַת
בְּנוֹ: וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר

And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him: 'Abraham'; and he said: 'Here am I.'
And He said: 'Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.' And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he cleaved the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men: 'Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come back to you.' And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: 'My father.' And he said: 'Here am I, my son.' And he said: 'Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' And Abraham said: 'God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said: 'Abraham, Abraham.' And he said: 'Here am I.' And he said: 'Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou art a God-fearing man, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me.' And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and beheld behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. *Genesis, 22.1-13*

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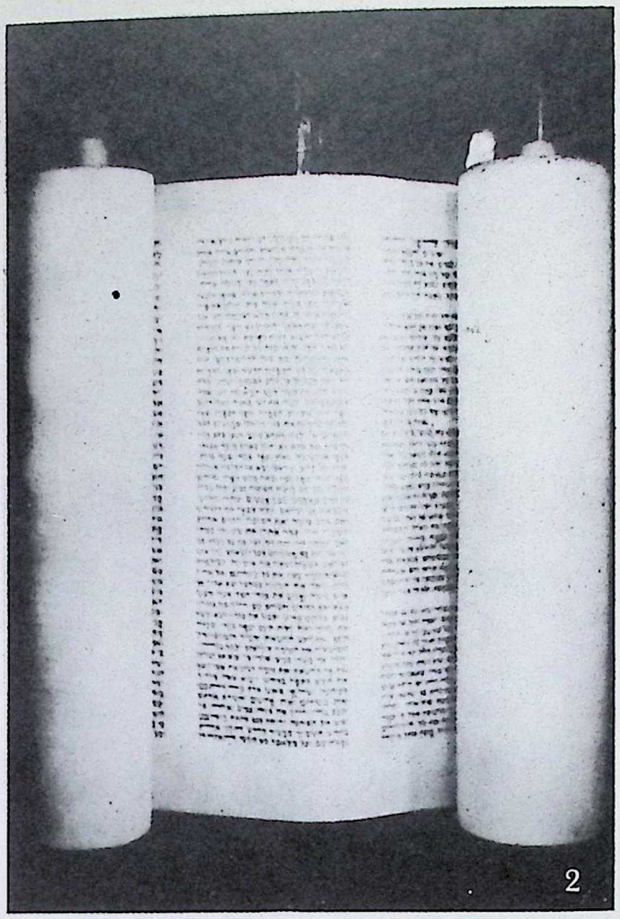

1. "Be pleased, O Lord, to bless the house of thy servant . . . (Psalm 16.8). Pardesi synagogue, Jew Town, Cochin, Kerala, built in 1568. It is the oldest synagogue still in use in India.

2. Sefer-Torah, scroll of the law, the first five Books of Moses (Pentateuch) hand-written on parchment, readings from which are ceremoniously chanted throughout the year. Opposite are some passages from the life of Abraham and Moses as recorded in the Tanak. It is read from right to left.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ הָאֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי בָּא אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ־לִי מַה־שְּׁמוֹ
מָה אֹמַר אֲלֵהֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר
כֹּה תֹאמַר לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם:

And Moses said unto God: 'Behold when I come into the children of Israel, and shall say unto them: "The God of your father hath sent me unto you;" and they shall say to me "What is His name?" What shall I say unto them?' And God said unto Moses: 'I AM THAT I AM'. *Exodus 3.13-14*

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: וְאַתָּה דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לֵאמֹר אַךְ אֶת־שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמֹרוּ כִּי אוֹת הִוא בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם לָדַעַת כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מְקַדִּשְׁכֶם: וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־
הַשַּׁבָּת כִּי קֹדֶשׁ הִוא לָכֶם מְחַלְלֶיהָ מוֹת יוּמָת כִּי כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה
בָהּ מְלָאכָה וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִקֶּרֶב עַמֶּיהָ: שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים
יֵעָשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה
כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת מוֹת יוּמָת: וְשָׁמְרוּ
בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית
עוֹלָם: בֵּינִי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹת הִוא לְעֹלָם כִּי־שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים
עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת
וַיִּנָּפַשׁ:

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: 'Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying: Verily ye shall keep My sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that ye may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. Ye shall keep the sabbath, therefore, for it is holy unto you; every one that profaneth it shall surely be put to death; for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel for ever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and rested. *Exodus,31.12-7.*

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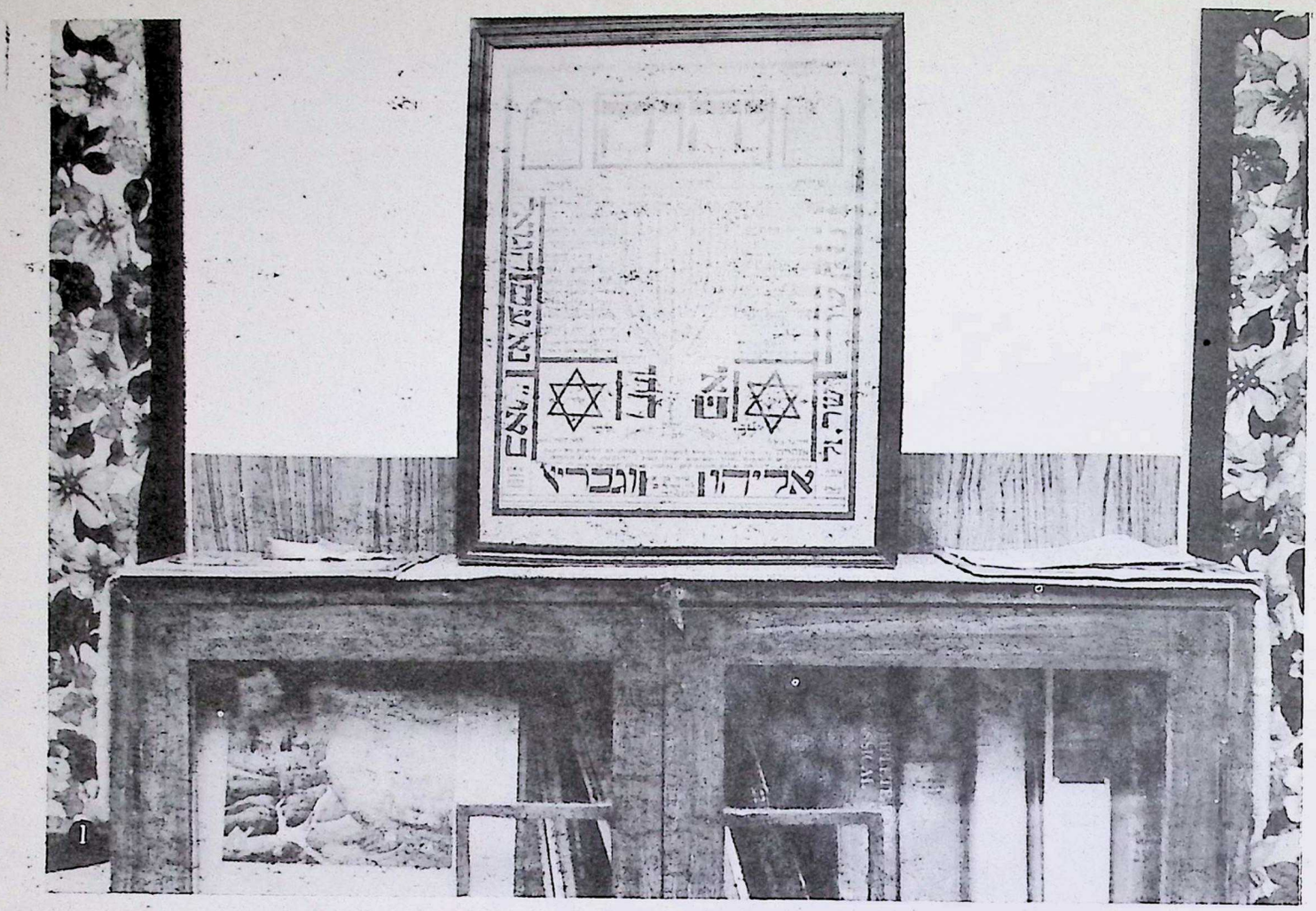

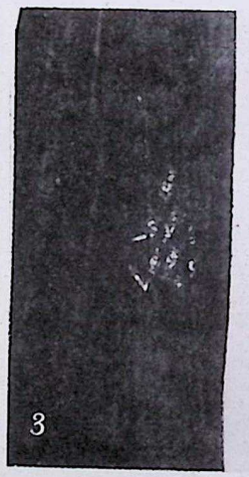

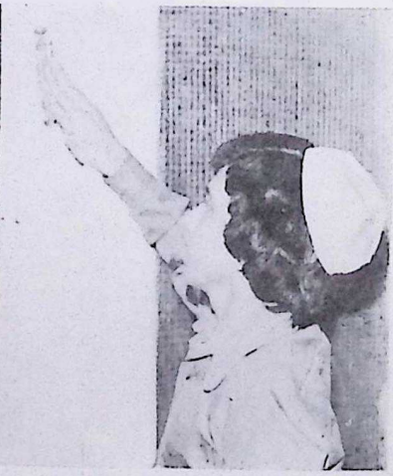

1. "God be gracious unto us, and bless us; May He cause His face to shine towards us that Thy way may be known upon earth." Kabbalistic Menorah, a representation fixed in a frame, is popular among Sephardim and Oriental Jews. The text of Psalm 67 often follows the outline of Menorah, the seven-branched candelabrum.

2. "Observe and remember the sabbath day." (Lekha Dodi hymn). Kindling of sabbath lights in a Jewish home.

3. ". . . and thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house . . ." A child touches the Mezuzah containing the Biblical text on loving one's neighbour as one's self. The Mezuzah is fixed on the right side entrance of every Jewish home as a reminder of love.

4. "My God, God of my fathers, on this solemn and sacred day, which marks my passage from boyhood to manhood, I humbly raise my voice unto Thee in fervent prayer that I ever walk the way of the upright before Thee." (Bar-Mitzvah prayer) A Bar-Mitzvah boy of 13 wearing Tefillin on the forehead and phylacteries on the hand as a constant reminder of the Biblical precept to honour God's commandments.

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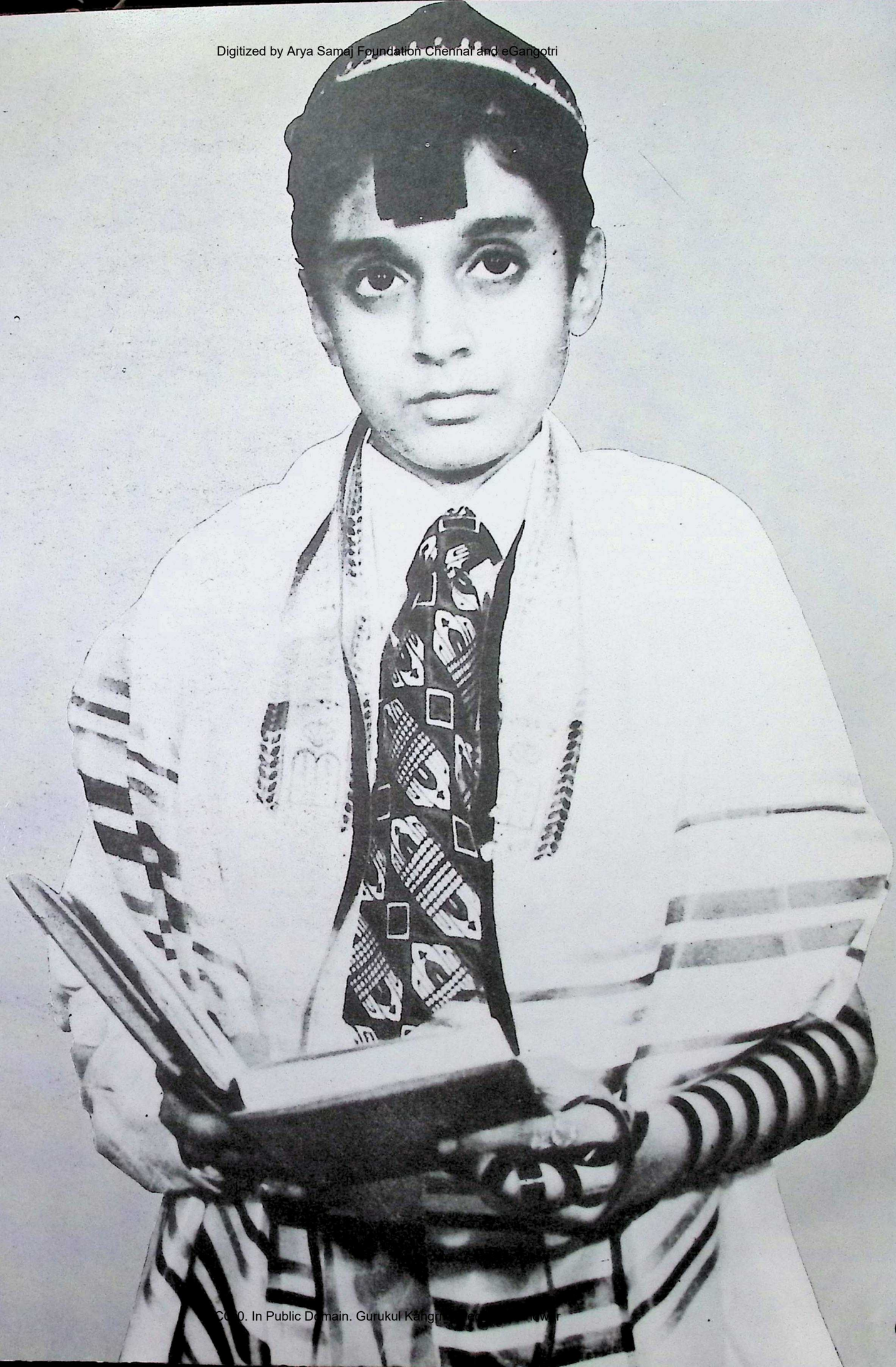

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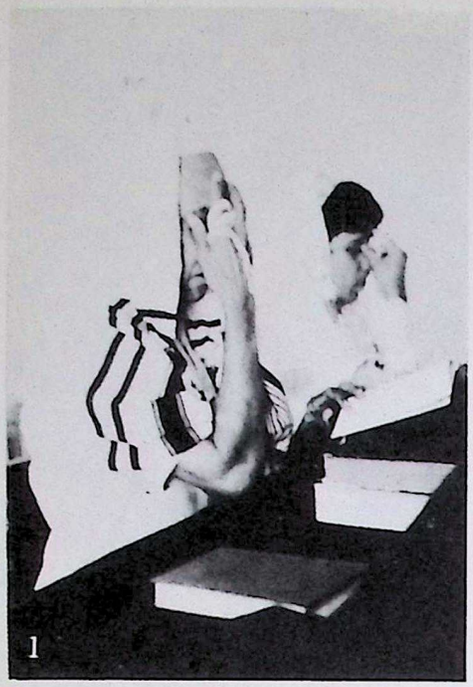
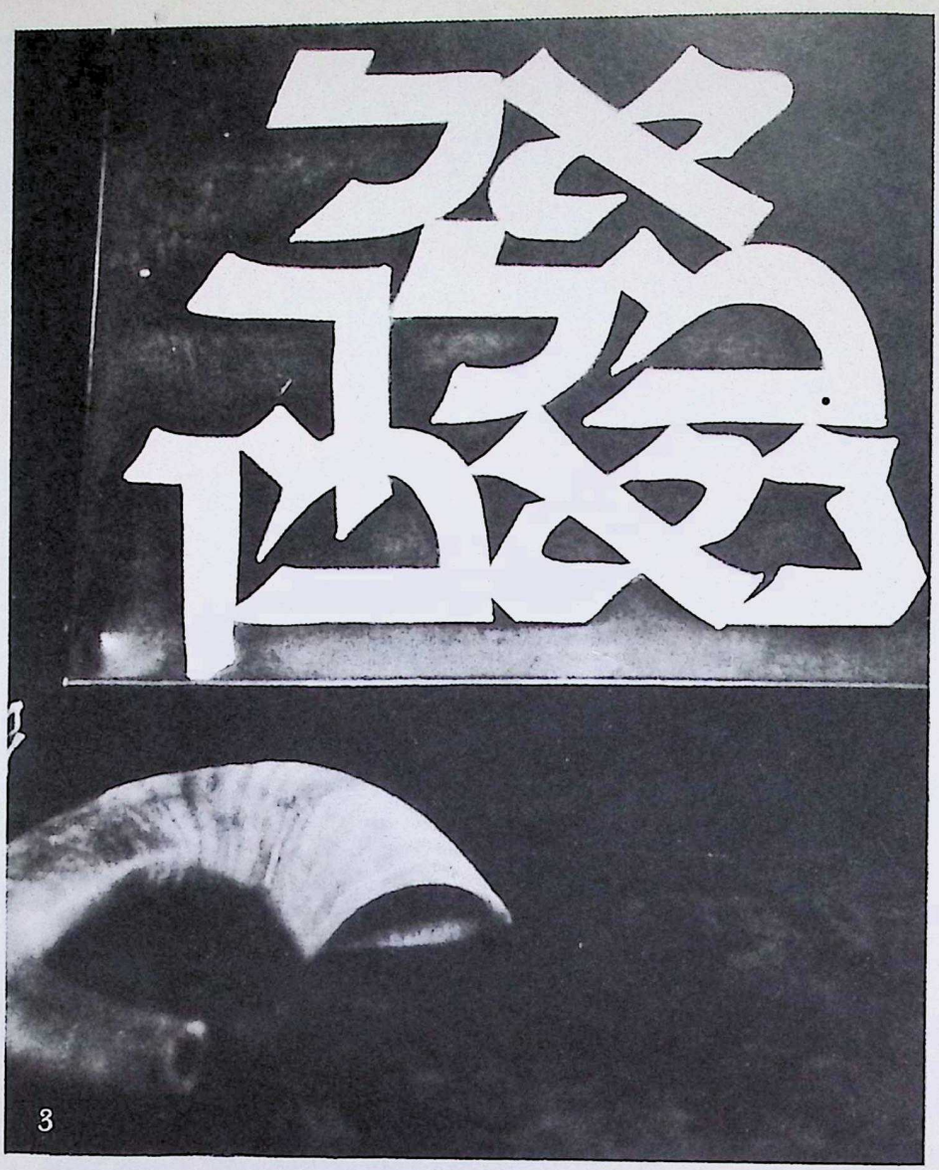




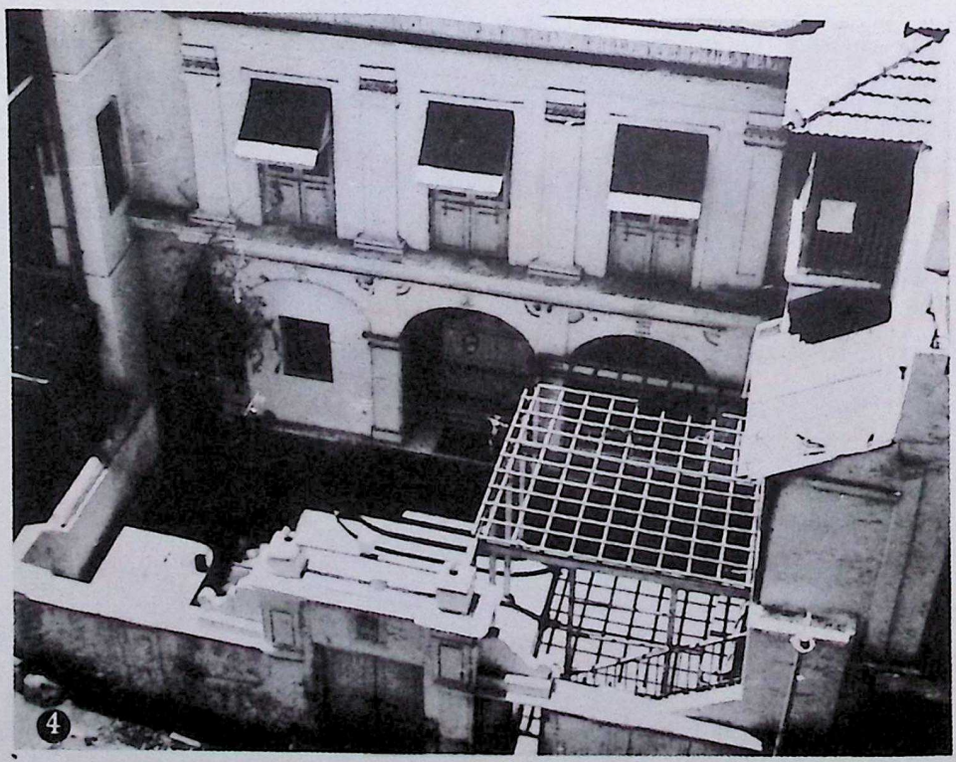
1. "Hear O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is One." Reciting the Shema in a synagogue.

2. Blowing of the Shofar—ram's horn—to alert and warn against the consequences of sin. In olden days it summoned warriors in times of danger.

3. A prayer-book stand with "Amen" in Hebrew. The word is formed with the first letters of the words El-Melek-Ne-Eman (God, Faithful King).

4. Shaar-Ha-Rahamim (Gate of Mercy) Synagogue, Bombay, built in 1796.

5. Magen David Synagogue, Bombay, built in 1861.



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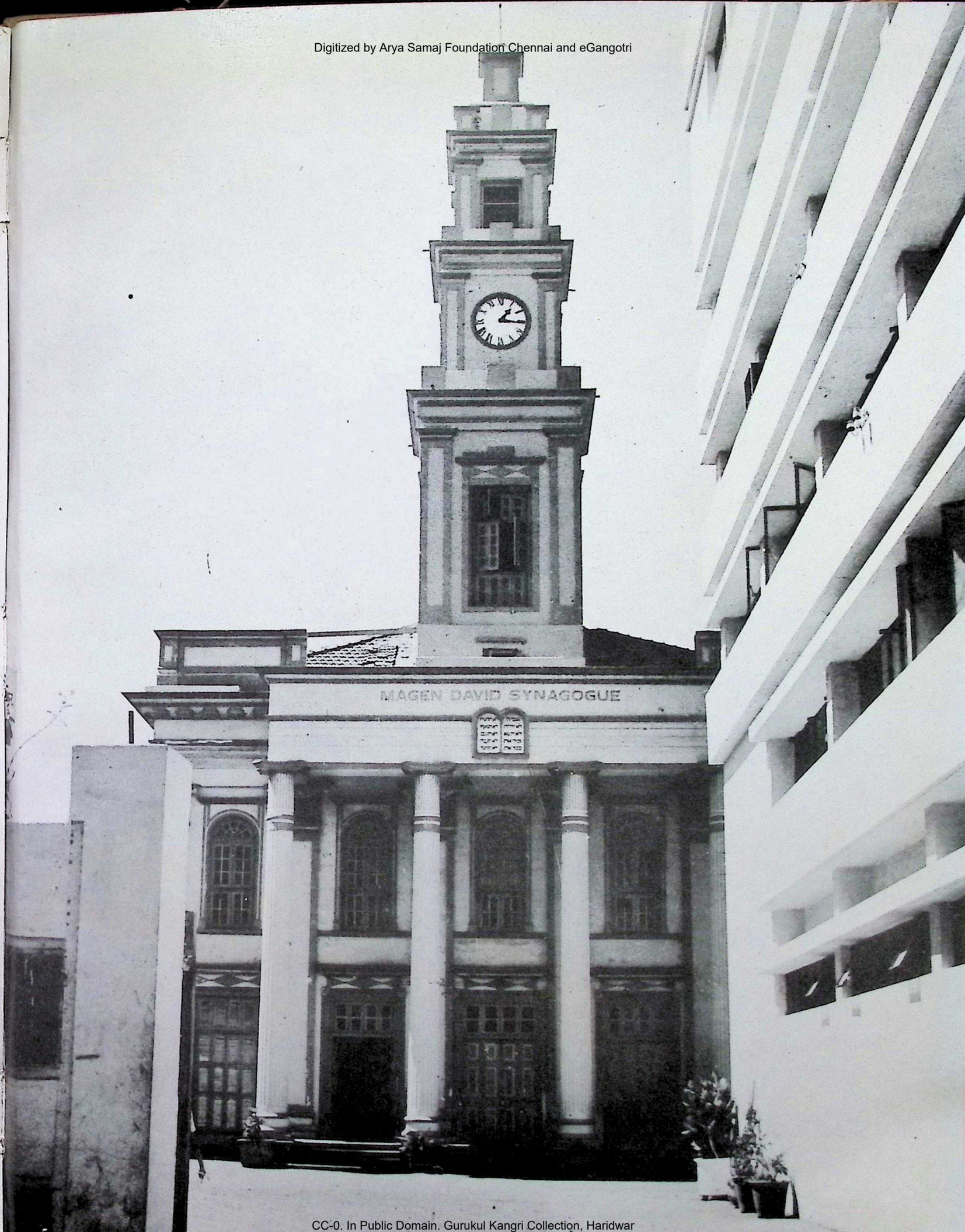

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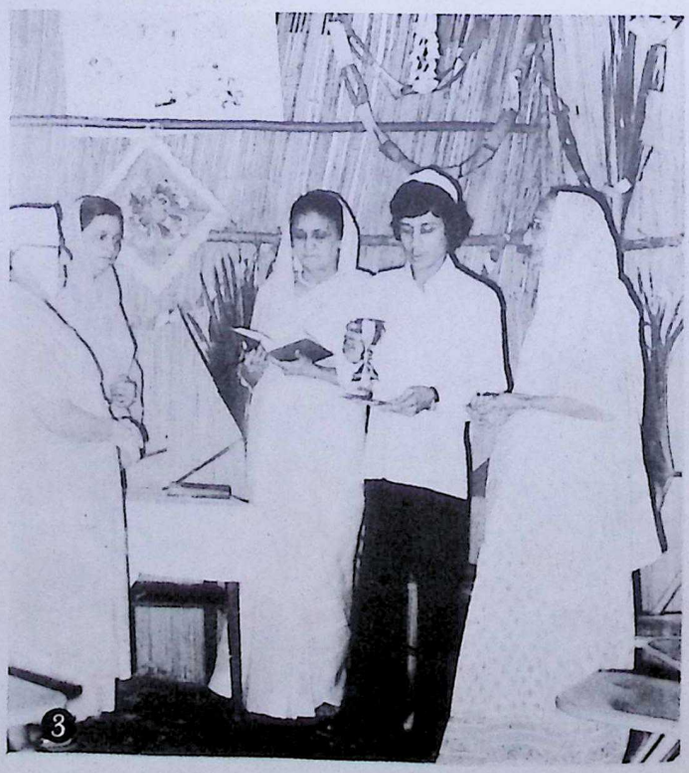

1. "Be glad and rejoice on this festival of Torah." Simhath Torah (rejoicing over the law) festival celebration in a flower-decked synagogue.

2. "We kindle these lights on account of the miracles, which Thou didst work for our fathers." Lighting the Hannukah, the eight-branched candelabrum on the occasion of Hannukah, the feast of Dedication.

3. "Ye shall dwell in booths seven days," (Leviticus Chap. 23.42). Kiddush or sanctification benediction being recited under the succah (booth) during the festival of Succoth.

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give thanks unto Thee, O Lord my God and God of my fathers, Sovereign of all works, Lord of all souls. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who restorest souls unto the dead.

There are also special and additional prayer services on the sabbath, and other holy days.

The Synagogue The synagogue is a place of Jewish worship, declared so by a religious ceremony when newly constructed or before initial use. It is generally a simple and austere structure devoid of any figurines or statues, owned by the congregation for purposes of daily and other prayers; also very often a centre for Jewish communal, social and educational activities, housing the Sefer Torahs (Torah Scrolls) and other sacred books. The Synagogue originated with the dispersion of the Jews after the destruction of the first temple in 586 B.C.E. and of the second temple in 70 C.E., when the Jews replaced the temple rituals and sacrifices by prayer offerings and services.

Observances Judaism says religious observances and rituals are of no value whatsoever when they do not lead to right conduct and moral behaviour. The principles have to be put into practice at every moment if they are to be meaningful. Gratitude to the Supreme Creator has to be felt and expressed at every moment. Thus, a prayer of thankfulness has to be uttered every morning for the God-given gift of life. Blessings are recited on the occurrence of natural phenomena like rain, thunder and lightning; thanks must be tendered for the pleasures and sustenance derived from pleasant sights, odours, good news, food of all kinds and pleasant happenings (as, for example, the wearing of new garments). Typical examples of such a spirit of thankfulness are: On waking in the morning, the following thanksgiving is offered:

**I thank Thee, everliving divine ruler,
that in Thy love Thou hast reawakened my
soul within me. Great is thy constancy.**

The following blessing is said over Bread:

**Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the
Universe who bringest forth bread from the earth.**

On hearing good tidings:

**Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe,
Who art good and dispensest good.**

On kindling the lights at the inauguration of the sabbath:

**Blessed art thou, O Lord our God,
King of the Universe, who hast sanctified**

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us by thy commandments and commanded us to kindle the sabbath light.

Just as in the Bible there is a constant dialogue between God and man, so in the journey through life every good act is sanctified by its relationship with the Divine. This is the best antidote to envy, jealousy and greed that play havoc with the human personality. The divine ties are emphasised at certain milestones of a Jew's journey from the cradle to the grave. On the eighth day after birth the male child is circumcised in accordance with God's covenant with Abraham, when the child is named.

And God said unto Abraham, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant which ye shall keep, between me and thee and thy seed after thee. Every male among ye shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and ye. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among ye, every male throughout thy generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any foreigner, that is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and my covenant shall be in thy flesh for an everlasting covenant.

Genesis 17. 9-13

For girls, there is also a religious naming ceremony.

At the age of 13, the boy becomes a *Bar Mitzvah* assuming the full responsibility of an adult and is called up to read from the *Sefer Torah* in the synagogue congregational gathering. For girls there is a confirmation ceremony at the age of 12.

At the time of marriage, bride and bridegroom meet under the canopy (the Chupah on the Tebah/Bima) in the presence of the whole congregation in the synagogue, with the rabbi or other leading member of the community officiating. The custom of the bridegroom crushing a tumbler towards the end of the ceremony is thought to be a solemn reminder for every Jew in the time of his highest joy of the tragedy of the destruction of the Temple thousands of years ago. The ceremony ends with the recital of seven benedictions chanted by one of the congregants given this special honour. The couple then go to the Holy Ark (where the Sefer Torahs are stored) and after paying their respects to the holy words of the Lord enshrined therein leave the synagogue amidst congratulations. Confetti and rice grains showered on the couple connote good wishes for fertility.

The Jew, if conscious, is enjoined to die with the recitation of the *Shema* —the fundamental article of faith in the unity and goodness of the Creator. After bathing the body and before it is removed to the cemetery, psalms and prayers are said and more prayers are recited at the cemetery before the body draped in a white cotton garment is lowered into a freshly dug grave,

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with the head facing towards Jerusalem. In the case of a male, his *tallith* (prayer shawl) is buried with him. In accordance with the injunction in the Torah, 'For dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return,' the body is interred without any coffin, or if there is a coffin, the lid is removed so that the dust with which the grave is filled touches the body.

A Jew generally covers his head in the synagogues and elsewhere during the various religious services. This is considered a sign of male piety and female modesty.

There are certain dietary laws laid down in the Torah like the prohibition of meat from animals that do not have cloven hoofs and do not chew the cud (so banning pig flesh), of fish that have neither scales nor fins and the draining away of blood from all animal food before cooking or eating it and avoidance of any creatures that are scavengers. The meat eaten must be *Kasher* (ritually cleaned) from an undiseased animal which is slaughtered in a special way to minimise pain and make the blood flow out. Another example of a food restriction is the law prohibiting the consumption of meat and milk foods at the same time; even the utensils and dishes used therefor must be kept separate.

In India there is a unique thanksgiving ceremony and religious service held in the home known as Eliya-hoo-hanabi, the central feature of which is the chanting of a hymn in honour and praise of Elijah, the prophet whose early return as the harbinger of the Messiah is prayed for. There follows a festive meal consisting of at least two kinds of fruits and a special preparation known as Malida of parched rice, nuts, raisins, shredded coconut and spices. The partaking of the malida, the fruits, etc., is preceded by an appropriate blessing. The prophet Elijah is almost like a special patron saint for the Bene-Israels who have a belief that the Biblical prophet had actually been taken up to heaven in a chariot from a hillock near the village of Navgaon on the coast of Maharashtra (near Bombay).

Charity must be practised and a proportion of one's income should be earmarked for this purpose, as a visible expression of universal love.

> **And when ye reap the harvest of thy land,thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather the gleaning of thy harvest; thou shalt leave them for the poor, and for the stranger; I am the Lord thy God.**
>
> **Lev. 23.22**

Education is given high priority in every family and children have to learn to read prayers when still quite small. The sanctity of family life is preserved by a number of home ceremonies and practices that bind the family together. For instance, the mother kindling the sabbath lights before sunset on Fridays (and they remain burning till sunset the next day) with a blessing sanctifying the weekly holy day, the refraining from lighting the fire and cooking, the complete abstinence from the daily round of duties, the

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special festive meals etc. all these make a deep impact on the children's mind and serve to knit the family close together.

ORTHODOX, CONSERVATIVE AND REFORM SECTS

In modern times, world Jewry has evolved an ingenious way of self-preservation, despite trends towards assimilation, by division into three broad groups, namely, Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, specially in the Ashkenazi wing of the faith in the West. While the Orthodox tenaciously cling to all the ancient traditions and forms of religious worship and practices, the founders of the Reform movement adopted the philosophy of changing with the times; religious services and rituals were considerably shortened, the use of Hebrew in the synagogue was to a great extent replaced by English or other medium of expression and many Torah interpretations were liberalised. While these radical changes were not approved of by the Orthodox groups, the Reformists argued that their movement had the good result of making Jews, who due to various reasons did not practise orthodox Judaism but yet wanted to be Jewish, remain so by adhering only to the main tenets of Judaism (for example, the belief in Monotheism and the ritual of circumcision) without having to comply with all the practices and rituals enjoined by the Orthodox, which they considered cumbersome.

The split gave rise to a third group, namely, the Conservative Jews, who follow a middle path and retain many of the main features of orthodoxy, but permit relaxations in certain cases; for example, in Orthodox synagogues, the main participants in the religious worship are men and women, who sit apart in balconies or in separate sections on the main floor. This is not out of disrespect for women—since women enjoy a place of honour in the Jewish hearth and home but because historically, while the Jewish mother is the queen of the home, where many of the religious ceremonies are performed, the men have to perform the public functions in the synagogues. The Conservative and Reform groups argue that with changing times, women have to be given equal status in the meetings of the congregations by being counted in the *miniyam* (the quorum of ten adults in the synagogue for certain ceremonies and prayers). In some Reform temples, women have even been ordained as Rabbis to lead their congregations.

Among Sepheradi congregations (those following Spanish/Portuguese liturgy and forms and most of Oriental Jewry falls into this category) as against Ashkenazis who are descendants of Russian, Central European and Western Jewry, there is no such threefold division, and the adherents observe one standard form of religious service and ritual, though some may be less observing than others.

KABBALA AND JEWISH MYSTICISM

This word Kabbala originally meant 'reception' and related to the oral Jewish tradition handed down by Rabbis from generation to generation. The

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mainspring of the Kabbala is a deeprooted belief in a perpetual inter-relationship between God in the infinite power and man in the physical world as we know it; man can achieve closeness to God by subduing his own evil inclinations and bringing about spiritual regeneration of mankind, through prayers, meditation and interpretation of the Divine mysteries hidden in the Torah. Kabbalists emphasise the importance of mystical formulas and the like in the recitation of prayers and psalms.

BETH DIN (THE ECCLESIASTICAL COURTS)

Jews have always had a system of ecclesiastical courts, known as the Beth Din, to settle disputes in the community on religious matters and also to act in an advisory capacity. These courts, functioning on a regional basis, are generally headed by a Chief Rabbi or Rabbis. Since the establishment of the state of Israel, the Chief Rabbinate in Jerusalem (comprising a Sepharadi Rabbi and an Ashkenazi Rabbi) is considered the final authority on all religious matters, although in countries where there are large Jewish communities, the national Beth Dins have their own Chief Rabbis who, *inter alia,* give rulings on such matters as marriage, divorce, conversion, etc. Particularly where there are large communities, such courts also supervise all arrangements to ensure that food in 'Kasher' is clean and readily available.

INDIAN JEWRY

Jews have been in India for well over 2000 years and one of the unique features of this tiny community is that it has never faced any anti-semitism from the people or government of the country. On the contrary they have lived with honour and respect in a land well known for the traditions of tolerance and hospitality. Indian Jewry now numbers not more than 7000 in the whole country, as against about 30,000 in the early forties, most of them having voluntarily emigrated to other countries—to Israel, the USA and the Commonwealth countries.

Indian Jews fall into three main categories—Bene-Israel, Cochinis and Baghdadi Jews, all following the Sepharadi form of worship and ritual.

The last group came to India as businessmen during the 19th century from Iraq and other countries of the Middle East, settling in cities like Calcutta, Bombay and Poona. Some of them like the Sassoons were very prosperous and contributed generously to philanthropic and developmental projects like the Sassoon Docks, hospitals, synagogues, libraries and schools. The Baghdadi Jews numbered about 5000 in 1951 but most of them emigrated to other Commonwealth countries thereafter and in 1982 there were no more than 300 left.

The Cochini Jews or the Jews settled in Cochin, as their name implies, originally came to India from Palestine and later from Spain about 18 centuries ago (according to tradition) and settled in Cranganore and other parts of the Malabar Coast, from where they moved to Cochin in the fifteenth

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century C.E. They were welcomed warmly by the local Indian rulers and people. While adhering strictly to the Jewish religious tenets, socially they became integrated into Indian culture and, as time went by, spoke Malayalam fluently. They built a beautiful synagogue in Cochin in 1568, known as the Paradesi synagogue which is still standing today and is a unique tourist attraction. Economically, they fared well but after 1947 most of them emigrated to Israel, with the result that their number has dwindled from 3000 in 1947 to less than 100 today. Who knows how long the community will survive in Cochin but the magnificent relic of the Paradesi synagogue and Jew Street will always serve to remind the world of their happy stay in India for many centuries.

According to tradition, the Bene-Israel (children of Israel) are the descendants of survivors of a group of traders who with their families were shipwrecked off the coast of Bombay (near what is now the village of Navgaon) about 23 centuries ago. There is evidence in the Bible to show that there was some trade between India and Palestine in ancient times, especially during the time of King Solomon. The local people received them well and hospitably. The Jews settled down in the surrounding villages and took to the profession of oil-pressing. Because they did not work on Saturdays, they were affectionately nick-named 'Shaniwar telis' (or Saturday Oil Pressers). Traditional Indian religious toleration and hospitality helped them to maintain their religious practices (circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, laws regarding food etc.) over the ages, and indeed the continued presence of Jews in the country is a living indication of the complete lack of anti-Semitism in Indian culture.

However, being cut off from the mainstream of Judaism, they eventually lost contact with the Hebrew language and teachings till some centuries ago when there was a religious revival inspired by one David Rahabi, who in his travels through India came to the conclusion that a sect of people observing so many rules and laws prescribed in the Torah and reciting the Shema on every occasion could not be any other than a remnant of the Jews who fled from Palestine at the time of the destruction of the second temple in 70 C.E. or even when the first temple was destroyed in 586 B.C.E. With the revival came a relearning of the ancient Hebrew language, the translation of the prayers into Marathi (the local language in Maharashtra where most of them were settled) and the building of synagogues in a number of places where there was a concentration of these people. The oldest existing synagogue was built in 1797.

It may be noted here that, as in Polish names, the Bene-Israels adopted as their family names the local practice of adding the word KAR (meaning belonging to) to the name of the village where they settled, so that a family settled in the village of PEN came to be known as Penkar. The first names, however, were zealously chosen from the Bible.

While the Bene-Israels adopted the language and some of the social

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customs of the local Maharashtrians, they preserved their unique religious beliefs, customs and practices without any hindrance from the authorities or the people in whose midst they lived. By the end of the first quarter of the 20th century, scores of synagogues were established in Bombay, surrounding villages and other towns, including New Delhi.

In course of time members of the community took to service in the army and defence forces, railways, posts & telegraphs, etc. as well as in professions like teaching, nursing, medicine and white-collar jobs where they worked loyally and with dedication. In more recent years, some members of the community rose to highly responsible posts in the government and also in private firms. Over the years while many moved to other countries by choice, in recent times the emigration has been reduced to a trickle, so that there is every hope that this unique community may not entirely disappear from India.

SHALOM

In conclusion the infinite longing in Judaism for peace and goodwill finds expression at every time and on every occasion. For example, the form of greeting Shalom Aleichem (Peace be unto you) figures not only when Jews meet one another but can be heard as a form of greeting by people of some other religions as well. There is hardly any prayer where the word Shalom (peace) does not occur; most of the prayers, be it noted, are not merely requests for personal favour from the Almighty but for blessings for all people and for mankind in general. Many of the prayers are supplications for the forgiveness of sins and comprise readings and contemplation of sublime truths and principles of ethical living. And thus it was that the prophet Isaiah in his vision of peace declared: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it.

'And he shall judge among the nations and shall rebuke many people and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. The wolf and the lambs shall feed together, and the lion shall eat grain like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,' saith the Lord.

It is fitting to close this chapter with a selection from the ancient prayer known as the *Aleynoo*—the closing adoration of every statutory religious service throughout the year, expressing Judaism's hope that all humanity will one day be united through recognition of One God.

It is our duty to praise the Lord of all things,
to ascribe greatness to Him who formed the world in
the beginning.

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We therefore hope in these, O Lord our God,
that we may speedily behold the glory of Thy might,
When Thou wilt remove the abominations from the earth,
When the world will be perfected under the kingdom of
the Almighty
And all the children of flesh will call upon Thy Name,
when Thou wilt turn into Thyself all the wicked of the earth.
Let all the inhabitants of the world perceive
and know that unto Thee every knee must bow,
every tongue must swear. Before Thee,
O Lord Our God, let them bow and fall;
let them accept the yoke of Thy kingdom,
and do Thou reign over them speedily and for ever and ever.
For the kingdom is Thine,
and to all eternity Thou wilt reign in glory;
as it is written in Thy Torah,
The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

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The Scriptures

And it shall come to pass in the end of days,
That the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow unto it.
And many peoples shall go and say:
'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
And He will teach us of His ways,
And we will walk in His paths.'
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
And He shall judge between the nations,
And shall decide for many peoples;
And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning-hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war any more.
The Lord killeth, and maketh alive;
He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.
The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich;
He bringeth low, He also lifteth up,
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
He lifteth up the needy from the dung-hill,
To make them sit with princes,
And inherit the throne of glory;
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's
And He hath set the world upon them.
He will keep the feet of His holy ones,
But the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness;
For not by strength shall man prevail.

Samuel, 2.6-9

Selections from the Talmud

"Repent one day before thy death." In relation to which Rabbi Eliezer was asked by his disciples, "How is a man to repent one day before his death, since he does not know on what day he shall die?" "So much the more reason is there," he replied, "that he should repent today, lest he die tomorrow; and repent tomorrow, lest he die the day after: and thus will all his days be penitential ones."

Avoth d'Rab. Nathan, 15

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Proverbs

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
But the foolish despise wisdom and discipline.
1.7

There are six things which the Lord hateth,
Yea, seven which are an abomination unto Him:
Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
And hands that shed innocent blood;
A heart that deviseth wicked thoughts,
Feet that are swift in running to evil;
A false witness that breatheth out lies,
And he that soweth discord among brethren.
6.16-19

A soft answer turneth away wrath;
But a grievous word stirreth up anger.
15.1

It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness;
For the throne is established by righteousness.
16.12

Pleasant words are as a honeycomb,
Sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.
16.24

Pride goeth before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.
16.18

Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith,
Than a house full of feasting with strife.
17.1

Festivals

Festival of Lots (Purim) (March or April): This festival celebrates the providential deliverance of Jews of the Persian empire in the fifth century BC from complete massacre at the hands of Haman, the wicked prime minister of the king whose kingdom extended from Ethiopia to India. It is the first recorded victory of the Jews over the forces of anti-Semitism and is marked by feasting, gifts and alms.

Passover (Pesah) (April): Passover commemorates the passing over the homes of the Jews by the angel of death before the exodus from Egypt three thousand years ago. It is a festival of freedom and its special feature is the eating of unleavened bread, *matzot*, to mark the extreme haste in which the Jews had to eat and leave Egypt without giving time for the leaven to form in the dough. During the eight days of the festival any form of leaven is strictly prohibited and the days before Pesah become for Jewish families a period of spring-cleaning to ensure that all traces of leaven are removed and destroyed.

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Festival of Weeks (Shebuoth) (May): The name of the festival indicates the period of seven weeks after Passover when it is celebrated. It is also known as Pentecost (50th day). In ancient Palestine the seven weeks constituted the season for the gathering in of the harvest. This festival also commemorates the events on Mount Sinai, when Moses received the Ten Commandments, and the day is also accordingly known as 'the season of the giving of our law'. The synagogues are decorated with greenery to stress the harvest origin of the festival in ancient times.

Fast of the Ninth of Av (Tisha-Be-Av) (August): This is a day of rigorous fast in memory of the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC and of the second temple on the same day in 70 AD. In the synagogue the congregants, as a sign of mourning, sit on the floor or low benches and read the Biblical Book of Lamentations—Prophet Jeremiah's eye-witness account of the destruction of the first temple.

New Year's Day (Rosh-ha-Shana) (September or October): This falls on the first day of the seventh month (Tishra) of the Hebrew calendar and is in commemoration of the agricultural life of ancestral Jewry, when the year began with the first month of autumn. It is a solemn day when Jews generally don new clothes, and pious Jews prepare for it by a daily fast from morning to evening for 30 days preceding. It is inaugurated by the kindling of festive lights in the home and the synagogue over which a special benediction is recited. Rosh-ha-Shana marks the advent of the high holidays and introduces the annual Ten Days of Penitence (days of awe).

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) (September or October): This falls on the tenth day of the seventh month in the Hebrew calendar and is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. After kindling the Yom Kippur lights at home on the eve of the day, the family, generally dressed fully in white, go to the synagogue for the Kol-nidree (all vows) service. This is a solemn declaration absolving all members of the faith from the unfulfilled vows unwittingly or impulsively made between God and man. The Day of Atonement is ordained by the Torah as a day for 'affliction of souls' and atonement of sins. A strict fast is observed from sunset to nightfall of the next day.

Feast of Booths (September or October): Immediately after Yom Kippur, Jews are enjoined to build booths to mark the festival of Tabernacles in remembrance of the temporary dwellings used by each Israelite family during the wandering in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. A unique joyful and holiday atmosphere prevails during the one-week observance of the festival when the pious spend their meal and prayer times in the shelter of the booths or huts, the roofs covered with leafy branches and twigs decorated with coconuts and flowers through which the stars are visible.

Rejoicings over the Torah Simhath Torah (September or October): This is celebrated on the ninth day of Succoth by singing and dancing in the synagogue, with the Torah scrolls held joyfully by the processionists, in seven circuits around the reading platform (Bima or Teba), in praise of the Almighty and in exultant rejoicing over the giving of the Torah by the Creator.

Hannukah (Feast of the Dedication) (December): Hannukah means 'dedication' and commemorates the rededication in 165 BC by the Maccabees of the ancient temple that had been destroyed in 175 BC. Hannukah is often an occasion for outings, playing games specially for children, and the exchange of gifts.

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अथर्ववेद १२.१.४५.

May Earth, with people in far-flung lands who discourse in different tongues and follow varied religious paths, pour for me treasure in a thousand streams, like kine of constant, unfailing bounty.

Atharva Veda XII 1.45

Treasures in a thousand streams have emerged on the Indian earth during the many millennia of her history: philosophical thought that soared to link the changing world to changeless verities, religions that embodied the perceptions in poetic ways of living, architecture that gives the impression of having been built by giants and finished by jewellers, sculpture, painting and music, dances in untold, sinuous rhythms.

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